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WIDENER



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A PROFESSIONAL RIDER

By

MRS EDWARD
KENNARD



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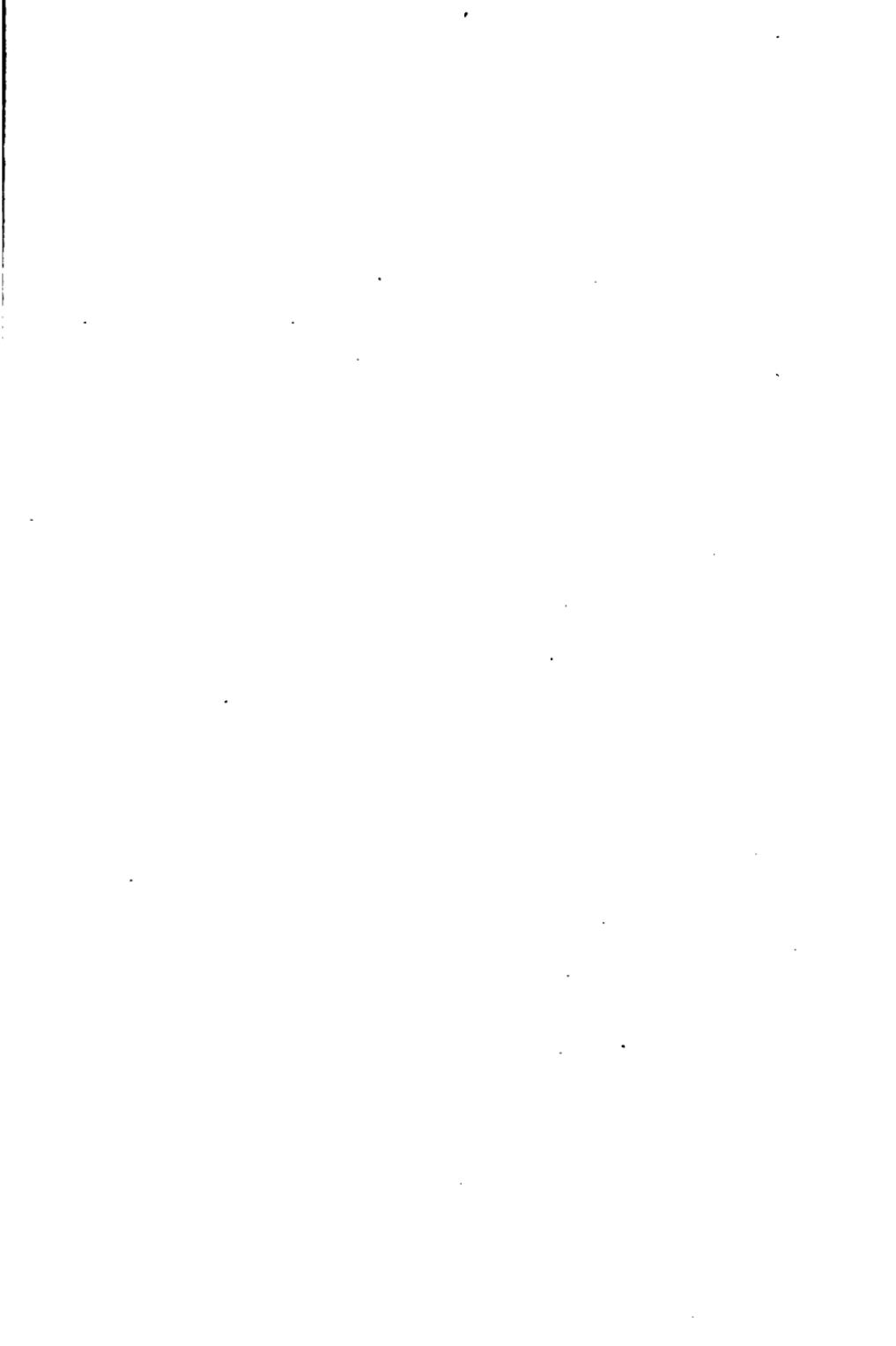
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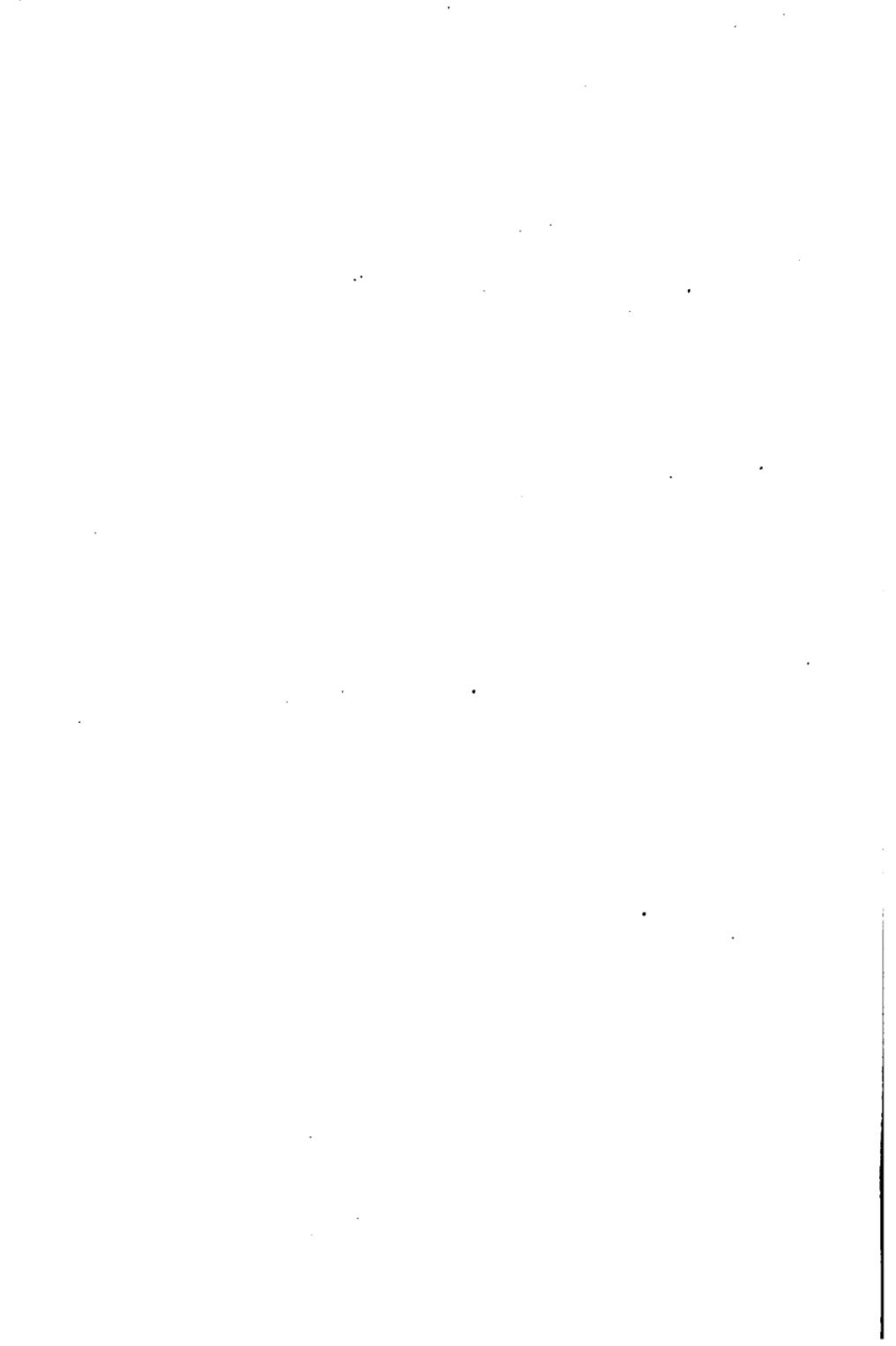
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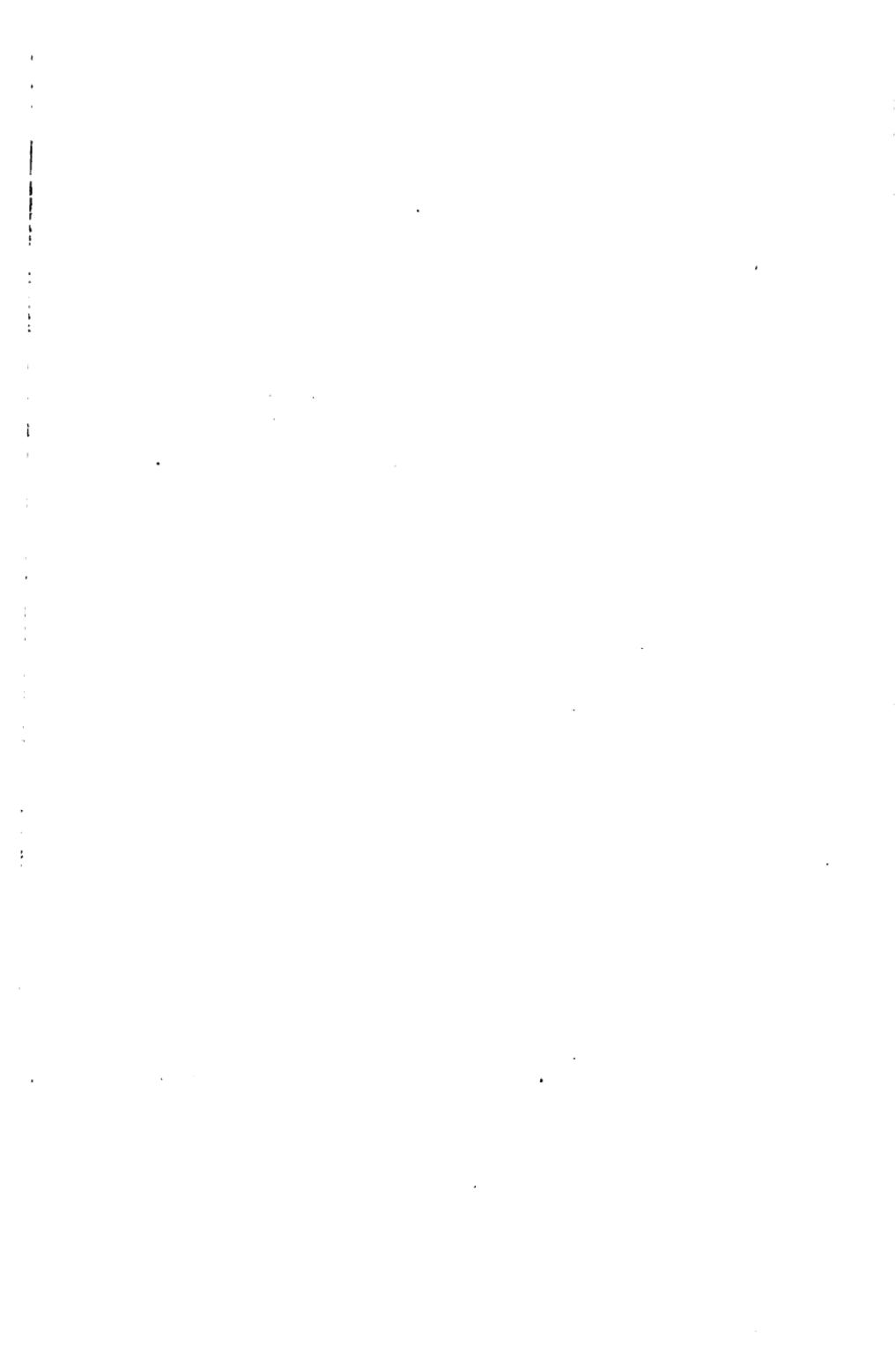


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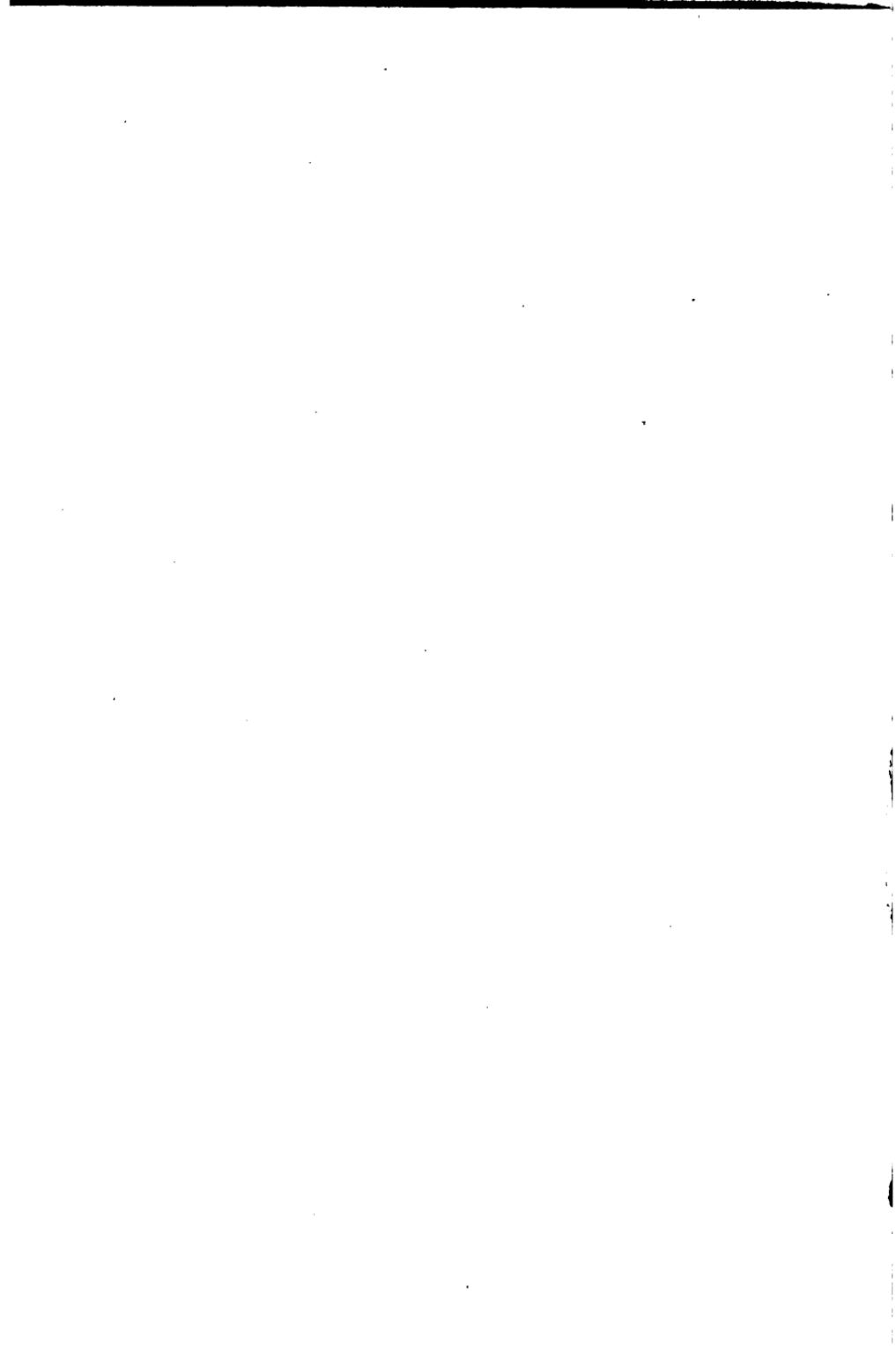








A PROFESSIONAL RIDER



A PROFESSIONAL RIDER

BY

MRS. EDWARD KENNARD

AUTHOR OF

"THE GIRL IN THE BROWN HABIT," "TONY LARKIN, ENGLISHMAN," "THE GOLF LUNATIC," "AUTOMOBILE ADVENTURES OF MRS. FENKS," ETC., ETC.

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A PROFESSIONAL RIDER

CHAPTER I

YOUNG AND FOOLISH

THE Misses Walker kept a seminary for young ladies, situated in the High Street of the little market town of Foxington. The sisters had started originally in a very modest way, but thanks to the excellent care they took of their pupils, combined with their own attainments and ladylike manners, the school flourished to such an extent that by degrees it became patronized by families of good standing and position in the County. Orphan girls were sent to the Misses Walker, since these excellent ladies bore a high character for the sound training given to those entrusted to their charge. The girls varied in age from eleven to eighteen.

In former days, Foxington was a quiet little place, but of late years it had developed into

quite a fashionable hunting centre. Not so gay as Melton, or so well-known as Oakham, or as strictly sporting as Market Harborough, it nevertheless possessed certain advantages of its own, which hunting folk were beginning to find out. To begin with, its train service was second to none in the Kingdom; then it was situated on gravel soil, instead of on the stiff, blue clay, which people living in the Midlands generally find so trying. Moreover, the necessaries of life were comparatively cheap. But to crown all, wire was an almost unknown quantity in the vicinity, and probably for this reason, more than for any other, Foxington found favour in the eyes of a particular set, addicted rather to bona fida sport than to late nights, bridge, dinner parties and gambling. Consequently houses of modern dimensions, but with good stables attached, sprang up as if by magic. Year by year, the town grew in size and importance.

The Misses Walker viewed the hunting gentlemen with feelings of considerable apprehension. Their establishment was situated in the High Street, as before stated; and smart, red-coated cavaliers rode daily up and down it when going to and from the Meets. This was distinctly bad for the precious flock confided to their care. As all the world knew, girls would be girls, and although strict orders were issued to the effect, that they were not to stare out of the windows at certain perilous hours of the day, but attend to their lessons, it must be admitted

that, in the majority of instances, they were openly and flagrantly disobeyed. The elder girls, especially, would insist on peeping down into the street below. Fortunately, at the time this story commences, there were but three sufficiently advanced in years to enter on a flirtation with the dread enemy--Man. These were Lizzie Holman, the senior young lady of the establishment, Alice Smithson, and Margaret Hope. The two latter were not yet seventeen, their birthdays falling within one week of each other. Margaret was a universal favourite, both with teachers and schoolfellows. Bright, vivacious and handsome, she never failed to make friends wherever she went. She was the only daughter of Colonel Hope of Hopetown Manor, and rumour averred that, at his death, Margaret would come into a nice little fortune. Colonel Hope was a stern, soldier-like man in appearance, extremely proud of his lineage, and a strict disciplinarian. Left a widower, he looked upon his daughter as rather an incumbrance than otherwise, and was only too glad to ship her off to school at the earliest opportunity, and resume his bachelor mode of life. Margaret was distinctly afraid of her father, and dreaded the time when she should have to go home and keep house for him. She felt constrained and ill at ease in his presence, and little sympathy existed between the pair. Colonel Hope was a good man and a just, but scarcely a loveable one from a child's

point of view. There was nothing frolicsome or unbending about him.

Even in the best-conducted schools, a good deal goes on of which the estimable principals are unaware. So it was at Highburgh House. It never entered the heads of the admirable Misses Walker to suppose that their elder pupils were in the frequent habit of discussing such tabooed subjects as Love, Romance, and Matrimony. They would have been aghast had they known to what extent the girls took notice of the hunting gentlemen passing in the winter time. Exercise in the open air was one of the chief features in their well drawn-up prospectus. Daily walks were essential to the health of their charges, and although selected with the utmost care, hunting folk had a knack of returning when least expected by all kinds of roads. The calculations of the innocent ladies were thus frequently upset, and cavaliers in all the glory of scarlet coats and white breeches would trot past the long row of girls, walking demurely in pairs, guarded by a strong escort of governesses and teachers. Glances were interchanged in spite of all precautions. The elder lambs, among the flock either would not or could not keep their eyes modestly fixed on the ground, as the Misses Walker vainly sought to inculcate. They proved singularly refractory. Both Margaret and Alice had already received reprimands as to the levity of their behaviour, but apparently the culprits erred, only to err

again. They had even been seen to smile. As for the handsome Margaret, there was no restraining her vitality and high spirits. She was always the ringleader in every bit of mischief that went on.

"I am afraid that girl is inclined to be a dreadful flirt," sighed Miss Walker to her sister—Miss Jemima. "It runs in the blood. Her mother only died in the nick of time to prevent a scandal. You remember that man she was so much about with? Margaret takes after her. She does not resemble her father in the least. I tremble for her future, Jemima."

"I think she is sensible in spite of all her fun," said the other. "At any rate, I hope so. If she does but marry well and falls into good hands, I predict that she will sober down and make an admirable wife."

"Time will show," said Miss Walker, a trifle dubiously. There was a pause, then she said with startling abruptness, "Jemima, I want to ask you something."

"What is it?" queried the younger sister in alarm.

"Have you ever noticed that big, young man with the dark hair and large, bold black eyes we so constantly meet when out walking with the girls?"

"Yes, what of him?" demanded Miss Jemima, unsuspectingly. "You mean the one with the curly hair and the smart tie, who does not look quite—well—quite like

a gentleman?" and she eyed her sister wonderingly.

"Precisely. I do not like that young man at all. In fact, I cannot bear him. He stares at our girls in a way I do not approve of, and we seem to meet him at every turn. He regularly dogs our footsteps."

"I can't say I have remarked it," rejoined Miss Jemima.

"You are a ninny, my dear. Anybody can take you in. I tell you that young man is after no good. When not out hunting, he spends half his time loafing up and down the High Street."

"Good gracious! Maria. You do not mean to insinuate—"

"I insinuate nothing," interrupted Miss Walker. "I only mean to say that, in our position, it behoves us to be careful. If I am not very much mistaken, Margaret is the attraction. You know what men are," she concluded loftily.

"Terrible creatures!" acquiesced Miss Jemima. "They go about like ravening wolves seeking whom they may destroy. Have you any idea who or what he is?"

"None, save a shrewd one—he is not a gentleman by birth. I fancy he is a new arrival, who has not long been in the neighbourhood. Of course, it may be entirely my imagination, but I thought it as well to caution you with reference to Margaret. We must

deliver her up safely into her father's keeping when the proper time arrives."

Miss Jemima was so aghast at the train of thought suggested by her sister's remarks that she made no answer. She placed infinite faith in Maria's superior judgment and powers of discernment. Maria never was wrong.

A week later, Margaret received a letter from her father, intimating that, as Saturday was a half-holiday, she might spend it at home if she pleased. This was tantamount to a royal command, and to disregard it would have given mortal offence. Margaret consulted Miss Walker as to sending an excuse, but that lady strongly advised her to comply with Colonel Hope's request. As Hopetown Manor was only about three miles distant from Foxington, it was arranged for Margaret to walk, accompanied by Alice Smithson, whose mother lived within half a mile of Colonel Hope's house. The two girls therefore set out together, rejoicing in their liberty, and promising Miss Walker they would not dally by the way. She thought it unnecessary to furnish an escort, since the Colonel had promised to send them home in his brougham.

It was a fine, wintry day and after an early luncheon the pair set out together. They walked at a good pace, and met with no adventure until Margaret parted from her companion. Hopetown Manor was such a short distance from Mrs. Smithson's residence, that

Miss Walker never thought any harm could come to her charge, if she went a few hundred yards alone. After taking leave of Alice, Margaret cross-questioned herself as to why it was, she so little relished the idea of going home, even for a single afternoon. Could it be because she felt infinitely happier at school, or did her father inspire too over-powering a sense of awe? Already she wished the visit were over, and yet her conscience pricked her, for in his cold, undemonstrative way, she suspected he was fond of her. Only, he never showed his affection. On the whole, her thoughts were rather sad for so young a girl. They were destined to be rudely disturbed. As she rounded a corner, she perceived a horseman, clad in hunting attire, mounted on a very lame animal, who experienced considerable pain in hobbling along, even at a slow pace. The rider's figure was not unknown to her, and all of a sudden the blood rushed to her cheeks in an irritating manner. The young man was the one Miss Walker disliked, but whom Margaret considered extremely handsome, and whose eyes had sought hers on previous occasions ere now. The recognition was mutual. He seemed about to speak, when, without warning, his horse gave a terrible stumble and pitched on its head. Throwing out both forelegs, it made a desperate effort to recover, but failing in the attempt, rolled heavily over, bringing its rider to the ground with considerable violence.

The young man lay motionless for a few seconds as if stunned, and Margaret was dreadfully afraid that he had injured himself severely. Acting on the spur of the moment, she caught the horse by the bridle and rushed to his assistance.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, in accents of genuine concern. "Are you very—very much hurt? It looked such a horrible fall."

He picked himself up, still feeling a little dazed, but otherwise not much the worse for his spill. He saw before him the bright, good-looking girl, who had excited his admiration on sundry previous occasions. He was by no means sorry of an opportunity of making her acquaintance.

"No, thank you," he said politely in answer to Margaret's inquiry. "I have had a bit of a shake, but nothing of any importance. I shall be all right after a night's rest and a warm bath to take off the stiffness."

"What made your horse tumble like that?" she asked, raising a pair of singularly beautiful grey eyes to his dark ones.

He returned the glance with such interest that she blushed and then turned her head aside in a vain attempt to hide the tell tale colour. And just because she blushed, he looked all the more keenly at her, and her embarrassment increased as she realized that his gaze contained some strange, magnetic quality, which sent curious little thrills of bashfulness,

alarm, pleasure—what was it exactly?—through her veins.

“The silly old fool lamed himself over a drop fence out hunting,” he replied, “and as I did not happen to have a second horse out, worse luck, I was obliged to bring him home at this ridiculously early hour. I was as savage as a bear until—until,” and he spoke with measured significance, “I met you.”

“Have you had a good hunt?” she queried by way of covering her confusion.

“Yes, I left the hounds running like old Harry. That was the hard part of it. I should not be the least surprised to hear that I have lost the run of the season. Which way are you going?” he asked.

She hesitated whether to answer this query or not, but he repeated it with a touch of mingled impatience and authority. When she took a shy peep at him, she saw that he was not quite as young as she thought. He was probably about eight and twenty or thirty. Miss Walker would be furious with her for talking to a stranger, but how could she help herself? She really was not to blame. And then people must be civil. So she said with some reluctance, “I am going to see my father, Colonel Hope, who lives at Hopetown Manor.”

This piece of information seemed to impress him. He addressed her with more respect, when next he spoke.

“Ah! so you are Miss Hope? I know

your father slightly in the hunting field. In fact we had a regular row not so very long ago."

"Indeed!" said Margaret. "What was it about?"

"Oh! I had the misfortune to be riding an infernal pulling brute that I could not hold at a fence. Colonel Hope took a toss just in front, and I was unlucky enough to jump upon him. Of course I apologised, but words ensued. I have often wondered who you were, Miss Hope. You are at Miss Walker's school, are you not?"

"Yes," she answered brightly. "I am supposed to be finishing my education."

"If only you knew how I have longed to make your acquaintance," he said. "but those old ladies are veritable dragons. One hardly dares look at the girls."

Margaret laughed uneasily. She thought she ought to cut the interview short, yet she wanted to hear what he would say next.

"Do you know that you are an awfully pretty girl?" he blurted out unceremoniously. "I suppose there is no harm in a fellow saying so, since the probabilities are you have been told it a hundred times already."

"Indeed, I have not!" disclaimed Margaret. "And I do not consider you ought to tell me such a thing to my face. You can think what you like."

She was trying very hard to act up to Miss

Walker's standard of propriety, but it was by no means easy. She might pretend to be angry, but when she wasn't a bit, what was the use of hypocrisy? Her admirer—if such he were—was much too tall, and big, and manly to quarrel with. Besides, it was rather nice being told you were pretty, even if you affected not to believe the fact. Margaret was young and foolish, possessing no experience of the world, and at sixteen, the hook that is baited with flattery is apt to be eagerly swallowed. The very innocence and unsuspiciousness of the victim renders her the more liable to be caught by the first good-looking adventurer who happens to cross her path. Fate had thrown Margaret Hope and Dick Garrard together, when to all intents and purposes she was still but a child.

CHAPTER II

"AS YOU MAKE YOUR BED, SO MUST YOU LIE"

IT was a terrible day. Out of doors, the elements raged with indescribable fury. A hurricane blew from the north-east, and driving snow fell in large white flakes steadily and pitilessly. The prospect was cold and drear, and hunting folk were in despair, since their favourite pastime was effectually stopped for a considerable time to come. Frost had laid its icy finger on the land, and showed no symptoms of removing it. Strings of hooded and clothed horses were to be seen cautiously exercised on sheltered roads. After two months of continuous hunting, they seemed to enjoy the interregnum better than their riders. Anyway, they were reprehensively fresh.

Just four weeks had elapsed since Margaret's visit to her father, and from that date, a change seemed to have come over the girl, which occasioned her excellent preceptors a good deal of anxiety. Instead of being at the top

of her class as heretofore, Margaret was now frequently behindhand with her lessons. She no longer took the same interest in them. She was dreamy and pre-occupied. If remonstrated with, she started and blushed. Only that morning, she had been sent up to the dormitory in disgrace, with orders to remain there until dinner time. Her geography must be learnt by then, if not, Miss Walker threatened to lodge a complaint with Colonel Hope.

"You used to be such a good girl," she said regretfully. "It was quite a pleasure to teach you, but really, Margaret, of late, I do not know what has come to you. You are very much altered, and for the worse."

The girl hung her head as if ashamed, but made no answer.

"Now do try and fix your attention upon your books for once," continued Miss Walker, with well meant persuasion. "I want you to be a credit to me—I do indeed, and you will never get on in the world if you contract habits of laziness and idleness whilst you are so young. Youth is the time for learning."

"I am afraid Margaret is not well," said Miss Jemima, when her sister spoke to her on the subject. "Her appetite is not as good as it was, and my impression is, she has something weighing on her mind, although what it can be I am at a loss to imagine."

"Pooh!" exclaimed Miss Walker incredulously. "What can a child of her age

possibly have to put her out? At that time of life, girls are little better than unthinking animals. I believe it is nothing more nor less than a fit of inattention, which we must do our utmost to check in its earlier stages." So Margaret was bundled off upstairs. To the surprise of her companions, she submitted to the indignity without a murmur. There was even a mysterious smile on her countenance as she quitted the room with strange docility. They all wondered what had come to her, for this was the first occasion on which Margaret had ever been publicly punished, and knowing the high spirit she possessed, her friends scarcely expected to see her obey without an indignant protest. However, the incident passed off smoothly, and nothing more was seen or heard of Margaret until the gong sounded for the mid-day meal at half-past one. Then, Miss Walker said to Alice Smithson—

"You can run up to the dormitory, Alice, and tell Margaret she may come down to dinner, but that I hope she knows her geography."

The girl departed on her mission, but returned in a couple of minutes declaring that Margaret was not to be found anywhere.

"Nonsense!" said Miss Walker sharply. "She cannot have disappeared like the vanishing lady. Perhaps *you* will go and fetch her, Jemima," turning to her sister. "She may be sulking, but we can't allow any temper."

Miss Jemima trotted off in search of their recalcitrant pupil. She remained away so long, however, that after an interval, Miss Walker herself went to see what was the matter. She found Miss Jemima pale and trembling with emotion.

"Oh! Maria," she ejaculated. "It is quite true what Alice Smithson said. I have hunted all over the house for Margaret, and cannot find her anywhere."

"This is very strange," said Miss Walker, with a sudden change of countenance. "What trick is Margaret up to now, I wonder? Start the other girls with their dinner, Jemima, and don't say a word to arouse curiosity. I must sift this matter thoroughly and cross-question the servants. Surely that naughty Margaret cannot have taken herself off home in a huff."

Miss Jemima descended and marshalled the pupils and assistant teachers into the dining-room, where the roast mutton and vegetables were in a fair way to becoming cold. Somehow, she felt very agitated and indisposed for conversation. She had a queer presentiment of impending disaster, which completely took away her appetite. Before long, Miss Walker appeared at the door and beckoned to her sister to come and speak to her. Miss Jemima rose from the table and followed Maria into their private sitting room. After carefully turning the key in the lock, Miss Walker said in a shaken voice—

"I fear—I very much fear, that this is a bad business. I have just sent a messenger off in hot haste to fetch Colonel Hope without a moment's delay."

"What is wrong?" queried Miss Jemima. "Has Margaret got some infectious illness?"

"No, something far worse. If my suspicions are correct, it would be a thousand times better for the unfortunate child were she in her grave."

"Good gracious! Maria. What awful thing has happened?"

"I have strong reasons to believe that Margaret has—eloped," said Miss Walker in tragical tones. "There's a man in the case, from what I hear."

Miss Jemima half fell, half sank into the nearest chair. She was not very strong, and her heart palpitated in the most distressing fashion.

"Impossible!" she gasped through blue lips.

"You well may say so," rejoined Miss Walker grimly. "In spite of our care, our untiring efforts and unceasing vigilance, if what I suspect be true, it means a terrible example of deceit and misconduct. And Margaret was my favourite pupil. Never have I been so disappointed in any human being."

"But the man!" panted Miss Jemima. "Who and what is he?"

"He is that horrid, forward fellow I warned you against only a short time ago. His

behaviour stamps him as devoid of all pretensions to being a gentleman. No honourable person could have enticed a young girl away."

"But how did they meet? Who introduced them?" asked Miss Jemima, still in a state of palpitation.

"That I can't tell you, but it seems the new kitchen maid, whom I only engaged six weeks ago is in his pay, carried letters, made appointments for them to meet and all that kind of thing. Needless to say, I have dismissed her on the spot, but she has done incalculable harm."

"Did the wretched creature admit her share in the transaction?" queried Miss Jemima, astounded that such awful doings could have gone on in an establishment like theirs, celebrated for its chaste propriety.

"Yes, she as good as told me that the couple have eloped together. When we thought Margaret safe and sound upstairs in the dormitory, she was with this terrible, young man all the time. You may depend upon it, they are married by now, and pursuit is too late to be of any avail. Of course, I was bound to send instantly for Colonel Hope, however disagreeable it may be for me to break the news. Naturally, he will visit his anger upon us, innocent as we are. But that cannot be helped."

"Dear! Dear!" sighed poor Miss Jemima in a sad fluster. "This affair will be the ruin of us. Our prestige will be gone, our establish-

ment discredited. Nobody will send us any more pupils. People will say we do not look sharply enough after them." And she began to cry piteously.

"Bear up, Jemima," said Miss Walker, feeling more than half inclined to follow suit. "We must be brave, and at any rate, we have one great consolation. Our consciences are free. We have not omitted any reasonable precautions. We did our best to guard and shield the unhappy girl confided to our care. But the man is bad to the core. My instinct seldom fails me, and I knew it from the first moment I set eyes on him. Very likely, he thought Margaret was an heiress, and tried to get hold of her for the sake of her money. I should not be in the least surprised. He looked a regular brute."

Confusion reigned supreme in the erst-while, tranquil dovecot. Try as Miss Walker might to prevent all knowledge of what had happened reaching the other girls ears, the news gradually leaked out, that Margaret had eloped. It created an immense sensation, as may be supposed, and lessons for the rest of the day were out of the question. Neither Miss Walker nor Miss Jemima were in a position to attend to them, or to instruct the juvenile mind in the disturbed state of their own. So a half holiday was granted, on the condition that all stayed indoors. Presently, Colonel Hope arrived in his brougham and asked to see the head of the

establishment. As yet, he was ignorant of the startling information she had to impart. Even Miss Walker's courage failed her a little, when he was shown into the room, where she and her sister were sitting. Dressed in a long grey overcoat, he looked taller and sterner than ever. His iron grey moustache stood out stiff with the cold.

"You sent for me?" he said in a tone of expectant wonder, glancing first at one, then at the other. "I trust nothing is wrong with my daughter?"

Then Miss Walker had to explain the reason why she had requested his presence. Her voice shook, try as she might to steady it. He did not appear to comprehend her statement, so wildly improbable did it seem.

"But all this is mere conjecture," he said. "You really have very little to go upon save your own suspicions. Where are the proofs? It is quite possible that Margaret may have taken it into her head to go home and I may find her there on my return. Girls are silly enough in all conscience, but I cannot believe that my daughter is such an idiot as to bolt with a young man in an inferior position of life to her own. At least, she is born and bred a lady." So saying, he drew himself up with an air of pride.

Miss Walker sighed. His attitude only made her task the harder. But she felt compelled to furnish a minute description of the abductor's personal appearance. The Colonel

listened with ever increasing signs of agitation.

"Why!" he exclaimed. "From what you tell me, it must be Dick Garrard, the horse dealer. If so, he is one of the biggest scoundrels unhung. Oh! Lord!" And with a groan, he brought his hand down heavily on the table. "I will never forgive either of them," he added presently, in a husky voice. "Never—never, so long as there is life in my body. As she has made her bed, so must she lie. As for you, Madam," he went on, withering Miss Walker with a glance full of wrath. "Words fail to describe my contempt for the laxity of your conduct. I entrusted my child to your care, believing yours to be a staid and respectable establishment. You have failed signally—failed miserably and wickedly in your trust. I hold you responsible for all that has occurred. Good day." He took up his hat and rushed out of the room like a whirlwind, leaving Miss Walker and Miss Jemima crushed to the ground by the severity of his criticisms. They had been prepared for much, but not for such language as this. Was no sympathy to be extended to them in their terrible misfortune? Were they to be held up to public opprobrium as objects of execration? Oh! it was hard—it was hard. Even Miss Walker was moved to the foundations of her being. She looked at Miss Jemima in speechless misery. They had striven sedulously for many years to make an honest livelihood and lay up a little nest egg.

for their old age, and the time when they would no longer be able to work. Theirs had neither been an easy nor a pleasant life. Up early, to bed late, they had toiled and slaved unremittingly. Only by dint of the severest exertions had their school risen to its present standard. Just when their ambition was realized, and at last, success seemed to smile at them, was their fair fame to be smirched on account of one disastrous incident? Miss Walker had quickly recognized how greatly the establishment was likely to suffer in reputation from Margaret Hope's rash act. She did not attempt to delude herself on that point. As already seen, she was not a woman easily moved to tears, but as the Colonel flung his parting jibes at her and her sister, the salt drops welled up fierce and smarting to her faded eyes. Would Mrs. Smithson remove her daughter, and Mrs. Holman hers, and all the other parents follow suit? It was cruel of Margaret to have cast such a slur on Highburgh House. Miss Walker felt as if she should never recover from the severity of the blow inflicted. Poor little Jemima was completely crushed. They sat there forlornly, seeking comfort from one another's society and hardly daring to speak. The toil of years was suddenly rendered fruitless.

But meanwhile, where was Margaret, the cause of so much suffering? Alas! she had yielded to temptation, and succumbed to the ardent wooing of an unscrupulous man. For

the moment, so great was her infatuation, that she considered it a very grand thing to be married before she was quite seventeen. Conventional weddings were not nearly so romantic as elopements. What would Alice Smithson say when she heard the news, and Lizzie Holman? How astonished they would all be at Highburgh House, and how well she had kept her secret! Even Alice was not admitted to a share of her confidence beforehand. The success of her schemes had been perfect. For some time past, Dick Garrard had exercised a certain hypnotic influence over her, which deprived her of the rightful use of her senses. She saw everything through a distorted medium, and believed implicitly what he told her. She was convinced in her own mind, that he was madly in love with her, that no other woman had ever occupied any place in his affections, and that the only reason he begged her to run away with him was, because, like herself, he felt afraid of Colonel Hope. Once married, it would be infinitely easier to ask her father's forgiveness, than to beg his permission beforehand.

"He would part us to a certainty," pleaded artful Dick. And Margaret quite believed the statement. Little by little, her lover wrought upon her, until she came round entirely to his way of thinking. The ceremony that bound them together as Man and Wife had better be performed quickly and quietly. The less fuss

the better. Dick cared nothing for clothes or presents, all he wanted was his adorable Margaret, so he told her, and she reposed the most infinite and touching confidence in his utterances. He was hers and she was his for—Life. Nothing could be more beautiful, more full of poetry and pathos.

Her girlish imagination was fired by the exquisiteness of the picture he presented.

She entered as lightly into Matrimony as one walks from one side of the street to the other. She did not pause to think that, most mistakes can be retrieved, save the error of an undesirable marriage. That is fixed and unalterable, except by crime. It clings round a woman like a poisonous shroud, embittering her existence, warping her finer instincts and degrading the nobility of her moral nature. The man drags her down to his level.

CHAPTER III

A RELENTLESS PARENT

ON leaving Miss Walker, Colonel Hope repaired without delay to the Police Station. There he gave instructions for investigations to be made, and a special detective was wired for from Scotland Yard to discover the whereabouts of Margaret, and ascertain if she had really married Dick Garrard, as was supposed. Next, he went to the station, and learnt that a couple answering to the description given had taken tickets for Melton in the forenoon. Feeling he could do no more, the distracted father returned home, half hoping to find his daughter there. But he was doomed to disappointment, and spent a miserable evening, a prey to conjecture and foreboding. The postman delivered him a letter the next morning, which confirmed his worst fears. It was from Margaret, and ran as follows:—

“ My dear father,—I am almost too frightened to write you, but Dick—that is my husband’s

name—declared that you never would give your consent to our getting married. He said we had much better go through the ceremony first and beg your pardon afterwards. All the same, I have a feeling that you will be most dreadfully angry with me, especially as I believe you have met Dick in the hunting field and did not get on very well together. His other name is Garrard, in case you do not know. I am very unhappy in my mind, thinking what you will say when you receive this, but Dick comforts me by protesting everything will come right in time, if we are only patient. I try to believe him, but he does not know you as well as I. I never thought that you cared for me very much, so perhaps, you will not mind, and at any rate, I am out of your way. I would have been fonder of you, if you had not frightened me so. I am trembling all over as I write this letter, but still, I hope—I do hope you will forgive me, even if you consider I have acted wrongly. I love Dick and he loves me very dearly, and—and—I feel in a perfect whirl. I shall not be quite happy, however, until you give me your forgiveness.

Believe me, dear Father,

Your affectionate daughter,

MARGARET GARRARD."

It was a very childish, artless letter in many respects, calculated rather to inspire pity than any other sentiment. The writer was so manifestly young and unversed in the ways of the

world. And already, her so-called happiness was not without alloy. Conscience pricked her even at this early stage of her married life. That was evident when one read between the lines.

But Colonel Hope felt in anything but a forgiving mood. His pride was deeply wounded. He had looked forward to Margaret coming home and making a sensation in the county. In his undemonstrative way, he was proud of her good looks and pleasant manners. He expected her to make a suitable marriage, certainly in her own class, but possibly above it. He had even gone so far as to cultivate friendly relations with a wealthy young lordling, having regard to the girl's ultimate settlement. It was not true that he did not care for her. He *did* care for her, but he could not alter his nature, which was cold and self-contained, and not given to effusion. His wife had also complained of being frightened of him, but was it his fault? Never by word or act had he been guilty of unkindness to Margaret, and yet this was his reward.

A check was put on all his parental aspirations. He heaved a heavy sigh, as he glanced at the schoolgirl characters, which had been wont to inspire a mild feeling of pleasure. He was furious with Dick Garrard. He regarded Margaret as a foolish dupe, little more than a child in years; but the man was thirty if not older, and had knocked about a lot. He de-

served to be publicly horsewhipped for having lured an innocent, ignorant girl away. But the worst part of the whole business was, he had no pretensions to being a gentleman. He was tolerated in the hunting field on account of his usefulness as a purveyor of horseflesh, but he possessed few real friends. Colonel Hope happened to know that his parents were of common origin, and report said, kept a grocer's shop in a large Midland town. Anyhow, none of the blue blood ran in his veins on which the Colonel prided himself. The young man had received the advantages of a college education, but on being dismissed, owing to some not very creditable escapade, he set up as a horsedealer. That was his history in a nutshell. His reputation for honesty and fair dealing was none of the best. Rumour declared, that he had played one or two of his customers some shabby tricks, which caused them to withdraw their patronage for evermore. Nevertheless, so great was the demand for trained hunters, capable of jumping and galloping over a country, that successors were generally found to fill their place. Colonel Hope summed Dick Garrard up as a real young scoundrel. A considerable amount of hostility existed between the pair when they met out hunting, and since their "fracas," they only exchanged the most frigid salutations. And this fellow was his son-in-law, actually his son-in-law! How could he receive him as such? The thing was simply impossible.

As Colonel Hope of Hopetown Manor, he had always been accustomed to hold his head on high and mix with the best County society. Why should he allow himself to be dragged down by an impertinent upstart, who thought to use his wife as a stepping stone for his own advancement? Since Margaret had not seen fit to consult her father before taking so rash and suicidal a step, she must abide by the consequences of her act, whether they were pleasant or unpleasant. Forgiveness was quite out of the question in the circumstances. It failed to benefit either side, or undo the wrong that was done. Colonel Hope determined not to answer his daughter's letter without due consideration. He therefore resolved to think the matter well over and defer sending a reply until the next day. His immediate impulse was to refuse Margaret's request for pardon uncompromisingly. But he would not act on impulse alone. If his sentiments underwent no alteration during the course of the next twelve hours, then he should know that his purpose was fixed and not liable to alteration hereafter. But the morrow failed to bring any change. He felt as strongly as ever. He neither could, nor would have anything to do with such a "cad" as Dick Garrard—for so the Colonel mentally apostrophized his new relative. The two men were of a totally different type, and essentially antagonistic.

After breakfast was over, the Colonel gave

orders not to be disturbed, and then he sat down to his writing table, and began to write to his daughter.

"Dear Margaret," he wrote, "your communication of yesterday has pained, surprised and shocked me, more than I can find words to express. I am cruelly disappointed in you. Had you foreseen all the pain your conduct inflicted in innocent quarters, surely you would have thought twice before occasioning so much unmerited suffering. Please understand one thing distinctly. I utterly refuse to meet your husband, either now or in the future. In my opinion, he has not behaved like an honourable man honestly in love with a girl. If I can help it, his presence shall never darken my doors. He has nothing—absolutely nothing to expect from me. It is best for you to know the truth without mincing matters, so that neither you nor he should build up false hopes. I propose to alter my will as speedily as possible, leaving your cousin at Eton my sole heir. I am sorry for you. You are but a child, and no doubt, the old proverb, "Marry in haste, repent at leisure" will apply in your case before many weeks have passed over your head. But were I to render you pecuniary assistance, I should equally be helping Mr. Garrard, and that I have no intention of doing. Probably, he fancied he was very clever when he married you, but he will find himself mistaken. On your part, you have forsaken me for a comparative stranger,

and cast in your lot with an individual distinctly your inferior in birth and social position. His relations are not likely to prove congenial, and as time goes on, the chances are, you will stand alone. All this you have brought upon yourself and much more. Again I say, poor child! I pity you from the bottom of my heart. You beg for forgiveness, but even if I could give it —which I cannot, how would it avail? You have sundered the ties which bound us and cast disgrace upon the family name of Hope. Henceforth, I consider that I have no daughter. We are as strangers. She—Margaret is dead to me. Farewell, poor, deluded child! You will live to rue the day when you committed so stupendous an act of folly, and broke the heart of a father, whom you profess to fear. Oblige me by not attempting to answer this letter. It will only add to my pain without shaking my determination. I must endeavour to bear this blow with all the fortitude I can summon to my aid. I feel quite twenty years older. Believe me, your distracted parent,

GEOFFREY HOPE."

As he finished writing, a mist gathered before his eyes. Although not given to parading his emotions, it did not follow that he had none. It was but the outward shell which appeared hard and unsympathetic.

"What a pitiful failure Life is," he mused sorrowfully. "We puny mortals make plans and cherish them for years At one stroke,

Fate destroys them and proves to us that they are mere castles in the air. Heighho!" and he hastily passed his hand before his face, "I have nothing left now to which to look forward. My bright, handsome girl is lost to me—lost—lost."

After their runaway match before the Registrar, the young couple proceeded to Melton, where a friend of Dick's offered them shelter for a couple of days. The short honeymoon over, they went to a small farm homestead, which, in anticipation of his impending nuptials, Mr. Garrard had taken on lease as his permanent residence. So certain did he make of Colonel Hope being reconciled to his daughter sooner or later, that he chose a locality within seven miles of Margaret's former home. He flattered himself that his wife would get round her father and induce him to settle an annual allowance upon them. But he reckoned without his host, Colonel Hope's letter proved a deathblow to his expectations. He was wild with anger at its contents.

"The old fool must have been in a devil of a temper when he wrote this precious effusion," he said to Margaret. "Evidently, there is nothing to be done with him for the moment, and we shall be obliged to wait till he cools down and shows a little more sense. You must approach him again by and by."

"Oh! no, Dick," she protested. "I never could do that after what my father has said in

his letter. You do not know how stern and unforgiving he is."

"Fiddledee," he responded. "Surely Colonel Hope will not let you starve. He could not for very shame. It would set people talking."

"Starve!" she echoed innocently.

"Yes, I should like to know how the dickens I am going to keep a fine lady like you, accustomed to every luxury and comfort?"

It occurred to Margaret that he should have considered this before urging her to run off with him, as he had so persistently done. His remarks were not exactly calculated to set her at ease. Indeed, she hardly understood them.

"Are you so hard up as all that?" she inquired, in a wondering tone.

"There's mighty little ready money knocking about," he returned. "Naturally, when I married you, I made sure of receiving some accession to my fortune. Financial help is very important to a man in my position. One wants capital at every turn to make the profession of horsedealing a paying concern."

Her eyes grew round, her face pale. She look at him incredulously.

"Oh! Dick, do you mean to say, that you ma—married me for my money?"

"I certainly did not expect to find you were absolutely penniless," he growled in return. "Your father is treating you shamefully, the old skinflint!"

"Pray do not abuse him in my presence. It is not right to do so before me."

"I shall say exactly what I please," he retorted surlily. "I am not going to allow you or anyone else to dictate to me, so the sooner you make up your mind to that fact, the better." And he scowled darkly at his newly-made wife.

"I—I th—thought you married me for love," she whimpered. "At least, you said so."

"That may be," he rejoined brutally. "But love is not paramount in this world. For one thing, it won't supply the bread and butter."

"My father will never forgive me, never—never," she said mournfully.

"You must write to him again in a fortnight from now," said Dick.

"Please—please do not ask me to do that, I really cannot." As she spoke, the tears sprang to her eyes in a burning rush. How changed Dick seemed.

"And why not?" he demanded impatiently. "Your duty now-a-days is to obey me and nobody else. I am the master," squaring his shoulders in an aggressive fashion.

She glanced at him, and a slight shiver passed through her frame. Was this the man who had told her he could not live without her, and that she was the only woman in the whole world he had ever cared the least about? She began to feel both perplexed and dismayed. Could she have been deceived?

"I always wish to obey you, that is, when

you are in the right," she said in an unsteady voice. "But I must also obey my father, and he distinctly orders me never to write him again and says he has no longer any d—daughter." As she uttered the concluding words, she fairly broke down and wept out loud.

"Come, shut up. None of that," said Dick. "If there is one thing I hate more than another, it is a whimpering woman. For goodness sake, Margaret, turn off the waterworks, unless you wish to drive me mad." So saying, he strode fiercely up and down the little, low-roofed room which constituted their principal apartment.

The tears still came. Try as she might, she failed to check them. Casting a despairing glance at him, she stole away like a wounded creature, stricken unto death. Then, it was true. He had married her for money and for money alone! He fancied she was an heiress, and when he found her father disowned her, he turned round and declared he did not know how to support a penniless wife. Until now, it had never entered her head to imagine that there was a sordid side to his wooing. She had believed in him implicitly, looked up to him as a very model of manly chivalry. Poor Margaret! her illusions were not destined to last long. Already, disenchantment had set in and was doing its sure, merciless work.

CHAPTER IV

THE RIGHT SORT OF CUSTOMER

IF Dick Garrard received no fortune with his wife, he soon made the discovery that she was likely to prove very useful to him in his business. Always fond of horses, and coming from a sporting stock, Margaret was never so happy as when in the saddle. Somewhat to Dick's surprise, he found that she could handle a certain class of animal better even than he did himself. He was what is generally called a "bruiser" on a horse. He had any amount of pluck and did not mind tumbling about. His critics said he was a capital hand on a regular brute. By dint of personal courage, a certain ferocity of character and an unsparing application of whip and spur, he bore the reputation of being able to cow the worst-mannered animal sooner or later. On the other hand, he was much less successful with a fine-mouthed, high-spirited steed, which required delicate handling. It was something of a revelation to Dick to

perceive how well his wife got on with a fidgety, nervous creature, with which he completely lost patience. Nothing in the way of tricks or equine vagaries seemed to ruffle her equanimity. No matter how her mount might fuss, she remained cool and tranquil. Undoubtedly, particular dispositions suit certain animals. An impatient, irritable person should never bestride a horse who is his counterpart. The eager, peppery individual requires a good-tempered, placid charger and vice versa.

There were yet two months before the end of the hunting season, and as she was likely to be useful, Dick kindly mounted Margaret and allowed her to accompany him in the Field. She had strict injunctions given her, however, and if she disobeyed them in the smallest degree, the vials of his wrath were at once let loose upon her. She soon began to understand, that if he took her a-hunting with him, it was not for the mere purpose of her personal pleasure, but for the more subtle and important one of attracting customers.

If well mounted and sure of her steed, instructions were issued to jump medium-sized fences, especially if she kept a few yards ahead of any intending purchaser. But on no account was she to stay out too long, so as to lame or injure her mount. If it were a young animal likely to misbehave, she had orders not to give people an opportunity of witnessing its transgressions, but to keep discreetly in the rear.

In short, she was to hunt with an object quite apart from following hounds. Margaret quickly learnt to depend upon herself, not on her husband. He was generally busy talking to likely customers, and she only addressed him when she had some information to impart likely to prove of service. On the whole, he left her pretty well to shift for herself. He frankly stated that he could not be bothered with a woman always at his coat tail.

At first, Margaret was somewhat shy of making her "début" in the hunting field. She doubted as to her reception. As far as the male portion of the community were concerned, she need not have indulged in any fears. Being both young and good-looking, she found considerable favour in their eyes. Almost without exception, they made it clear that they had not the slightest intention of boycotting her. But with the ladies it was different. The majority were intimate with her father, who visited them at their houses. When Colonel Hope was not on speaking terms with his daughter, it rendered it exceedingly awkward cultivating Mrs. Garrard's acquaintance. To be friendly with both was manifestly impossible, and they had to choose between the representative of an old County family—a man who was one of themselves, so to speak, and the runaway wife of a common horsedealer. Their choice could only lie in one direction. Perhaps, they were hardly to blame. The consequence was,

however, that Margaret found herself with few female allies. They confined themselves to a formal salutation, or a civil word or two. Margaret would rather have talked to one woman than to a dozen men, but she did not resent the attitude of her own sex. She quite realized her position, and recognised that in marrying as she had done she had lost caste. But what tried her more sorely than anything else, was hunting with the same pack of hounds as her father, and being brought into constant contact with him. Often, it so happened that they met at a fence, or were jammed up against one another in a gateway. When she looked at him with pleading eyes full of mute entreaty, he invariably turned his head aside. That stung her to the quick, and made her heart swell to bursting point. A craving for forgiveness filled her being. She did not want his money, she did not ask for any favours, but she hungered for a kind word. She tried to stay at home and avoid these exquisitely painful meetings, but Dick, with his coarser nature, only jeered at her, when she said how miserable it made her to be cut dead by her own father. He accused her of being thin-skinned and ridiculously sensitive.

“What does it matter if the old bloke won’t talk to you?” he demanded. “Since he refuses to help us, the loss of his conversation is no great calamity.”

But Margaret was of a different opinion.

As her husband had no sympathy to offer, she gave up endeavouring to extract it. The only plan was to bear her troubles in silence and not attempt to make a confidant of Dick. But it came hard all the same. She was naturally open and expansive, but circumstances were rapidly raising a barricade of reserve round her as a means of self-defence. When your finer feelings are trampled upon day after day, you soon learn not to parade them. Such lessons are only learnt at the cost of all personal happiness, nevertheless, many wives have to master them. If unfortunate in her experiences, Margaret did not stand alone.

People admired her riding extremely. She had a beautiful figure, an upright seat, and the lightest of hands. Folk discovered by degrees, that a pretty, pleasant-spoken young woman has a curious knack of showing off a horse to best advantage. Dick's customers gradually increased. He did more bona fide business than at any previous period of his career, and even he could not help perceiving he owed much of his success to his wife. Not that he was any less strict with her on that account. The smallest indiscretion on her part would have been visited with condign punishment. But since her marriage, all love of flirtation seemed to have vanished. She behaved as soberly as if she were fifty, instead of just seventeen. Dick noted this with satisfaction, although, of course, he attributed her steadiness

to his own powers of fascination, and never suspected that her love had already given place to fear, her confidence in him to distrust. He was one of those happily-constituted, self-satisfied personages, who cannot see a flaw in Number One, and who take it for granted their women-kind are fond, subservient and meek, no matter what trials they are subjected to.

Many of the hunting men took to walking over on non-hunting days, for the ostensible purpose of looking round the stables. They seldom departed without asking to see Mrs. Garrard, when they profited by the opportunity to ascertain her opinion regarding some animal she had recently ridden. At first, being ingenuous and unsophisticated, Margaret spoke the truth.

But this did not always suit Master Dick. His methods were far more devious. When she let out all the stable secrets, Margaret got into terrible trouble with her husband. She heard him telling gratuitous falsehoods, which set her teeth on edge. Verily, they were an ill-assorted pair. When he wished her to follow his example, she flatly refused.

“I really cannot tell stories, even to please you,” she said disdainfully. “It is no use asking me to purposely deceive people. Besides, I am sure it is bad policy, if only from the point of view of self-interest. One gets on much better in the end by being honest and straightforward.”

This speech made him furious. He ground his teeth with anger.

"You silly, little fool!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "Do you actually mean to teach me to manage my own business? That is beyond a joke. You are getting much too uppish, let me tell you, and I shall not tolerate your airs and graces for a moment. Now listen to what I am going to say."

"What is it?" she demanded curtly.

"I expect that young idiot, Edmund Dorrington over here this afternoon. He is after the brown mare with the bang tail you hunted the day before yesterday—"

"Yes," she interrupted. "He told me how much he admired her, but I said I was afraid she would not quite suit him."

"You didn't, Margaret! Really, I have a good mind to shut you up in a lunatic asylum. The mare has been in this stable quite four months, and the long and the short of the business is, I mean Dorrington to have her."

"You can't *make* him," said Margaret defiantly. "The mare is gone in the wind, and you know it. I mentioned it to you a fortnight ago."

"*You* mentioned it to me indeed! Ha ha! I like that. Since when may I ask have you set up as a veterinary surgeon? The mare was passed sound when I bought her at the beginning of the season, and I know nothing

about her wind—nothing whatever, mark you." And he scowled at his wife.

"Oh! Dick," she ejaculated in remonstrance.

"Will you shut up, Margaret? Why are you for ever opposing me?"

"Because I do not approve of your doing mean, shabby things. Mr. Dorrington is certain to find out sooner or later that the mare is not right."

"Bah! later won't matter. The season is just over. If an animal goes wrong in the wind after a summer's rest nobody can blame the seller. Dorrington does not know a horse from a donkey. Leave me to manage him. All I ask of you is to keep quiet and not volunteer gratuitous information harmful to my interests. Surely, that is a proper and reasonable request for any husband to make of his wife?"

"But Dick—" she began. He cut her short, however.

"Now, just do as you are asked for once. Put on your habit and be ready when I send into the house to fetch you. For some reason or other, the mare gives a better show when you are on her back than with me. Goodness only knows why, but there it is. She has such a horribly light mouth, that the least touch puts her out and makes her chuck her head up."

Margaret said no more. She knew the uselessness of opposing her lord and master. He would have his way. Unfortunately, their

ideas of right and wrong did not agree, and she detested being made a party to any transaction not perfectly open and above board. If she did not submit, Dick had the knack of making matters extremely unpleasant. Rather than face a scene, she frequently gave in and did violence to her better judgment. She liked young Dorrington. He had been kind to her out hunting once or twice, and she disliked the idea of selling him an unsound horse simply because he was ignorant and rich. True, they were very poor and wanted money badly, but her instinct revolted from anything underhand.

There were so many horses to exercise during the course of the day, that Margaret more or less lived in her habit. Therefore, when her husband called for her to come out into the yard about three o'clock that same afternoon, she was already fully equipped.

"Dorrington is as keen as mustard about the mare," he whispered in her ear. "For Heaven's sake, don't go putting him off. It would be too bad."

She followed him without a word into the stable yard, where stood young Dorrington—a nice fresh lad of one and twenty. They shook hands cordially, after which, she stepped on to a stone block, and the mare being ranged alongside, Margaret vaulted lightly into the saddle. Taking the reins up gently, she bent forward and patted the animal's glossy neck. The brown was a beauty to look at,

nearly thorough-bred, yet possessing plenty of bone and substance. Dick had hogged her main and docked her tail, shortly after she became his property so as to prevent the casual observer from recognizing her as an animal purchased not very far from home. She stood on splendid legs, as clean as a two year old's, had a great jumping back and loins and a fine sloping shoulder. Her principal defect consisted in a long and slender neck, which presaged wind troubles. Taking her altogether, however, she was a picture in appearance. Margaret was well up in the ordinary routine of a dealer's yard. She first walked the mare slowly round and round; then, took her on to the road and trotted her up and down the macadam. Finally, the whole party repaired to a field close at hand, where Dick had caused several artificial fences to be arranged.

Margaret touched the high-spirited animal lightly with her heel, and immediately she broke into a long, swinging canter, that covered the ridge and furrow with consummate ease. Her action was admirable.

"Moves well, don't she?" observed Dick to his companion. "You would not think the mare is going as fast as she is in reality. Her stride is wonderfully deceptive. There! now my missus is letting her out. Of course," he added critically, "ladies are no real good at galloping a horse. They never can send them along like a man, with a leg on either side,

but Mrs. Garrard has a great fancy for riding this particular animal. She is so fond of the mare."

"I don't wonder at that," said young Dorrington. "She carries her awfully well."

"Well over!" ejaculated Dick, as Margaret set the brown at a bushed-up hedge, and the mare cleared it like a deer with yards to spare. "Although I say it, who perhaps shouldn't, I never had a better fencer in my stable."

"I saw Mrs. Garrard jump her in and out of a road last Tuesday," said Mr. Dorrington. "A great many of the horses bungled, but your wife cleared it in splendid style, popping over most beautifully. I took a fancy to her mount from that moment. The mare seemed so clever and so temperate into the bargain."

"Get on her back and try what sort of a feel she gives you," said Dick.

"I should like to very much," returned the other.

Upon this, Dick put up his hand as a signal to Margaret to return. She at once pulled the mare up to a walk, and brought her slowly back to where her husband and Mr. Dorrington were standing in the middle of the field. The animal's sides quivered perceptibly, and her nostrils were widely distended.

"Seems a little short of condition, doesn't she?" hazarded young Dorrington.

"Oh!" said Dick, "That's nothing. You may take my word for it. She's a bit of a high

blower when first you bring her out of the stable."

The mare was now conducted back to the yard and fitted with a gentleman's saddle. The intending customer then got on and sent her three times round the field at an excellent pace. Apparently he was pleased with his mount, for after a while, he put her straight at the fences, and she jumped them one after another, without making the slightest mistake. His hat flew off, but he did not stop to pick it up, leaving a stable helper to perform that office. When he finally came to a halt, his boyish face was flushed with pleasure. "She's a ripper, a real ripper," he cried enthusiastically. "I can't tell you how much I like her, Garrard. She gives you a wonderful feel."

"I knew you would be pleased with her," responded Dick cordially.

He liked a customer who threw caution and suspicion to the winds, and accepted all his statements without demur.

"What did you say the figure was?" asked the boy, for he was little more.

"Two hundred and fifty," answered Dick, without a moment's hesitation. "The mare is cheap at that to any one wanting a real safe, pleasant conveyance over a country. She's a nailer to hounds. You don't suppose I should put my Missus on her if she weren't one of the very best."

Margaret opened her eyes at this statement,

and also at the price demanded. But the customer did not seem to consider the latter out of the way.

CHAPTER V

THE LAST HUNT OF THE SEASON.

PRESENTLY, Mr. Dorrington dismounted and looked the mare over from top to toe. He did not pretend to know much about the points of a hunter, but scarcely liked to give himself away by confessing his ignorance.

"I say, Garrard," he observed. "I suppose she is all right in her wind, eh? I had a suspicion—just a suspicion—don't you know—" stopping short, as if afraid of giving offence by the mere suggestion.

Dick drew himself up to his full height and looked the personification of probity, but he resolutely refused to meet his wife's glance of inquiry.

"My dear sir," he said, "you may take my word for it, that the mare is as sound as a bell in every particular. I bought her at the beginning of the winter, as I told you, and since then, she has never been sick nor sorry for a single day—anyway, according to my knowledge

However, if you have doubts about her, I will show you something else with pleasure. She is an animal that I can always sell with very little difficulty. The good ones soon go, and I have several customers after her as it is."

"I can quite believe that," said young Dorrington innocently. "It was only my fancy, you know, but I daresay I am wrong. I expect I was."

"Take the mare or leave her as you like," said Dick, with a well-simulated assumption of indifference. "It's all one to me, I can assure you. John," calling to an underling, "lead the brown mare back and let her be walked about for five minutes to get cool. Put a saddle and bridle on the big grey horse, standing in the top box but one. And look sharp."

The man went off to fulfil his master's bidding. Meanwhile, Mr. Dorrington vainly endeavoured to obtain a few minutes' private conversation with Margaret. He wanted to discover her opinion of the animal's wind, and to ask if she had ever noticed, that the mare made a slight—very slight noise. But Dick was much too artful to give him the opportunity he desired. If his wife were asked a straight question of an awkward nature, he could not place implicit confidence in her answer. She was quite capable of letting out too much. He therefore signed to her to retire to the house, since her mission was at an end, and she only too gladly availed herself of the permission.

A quarter of an hour later, Dick joined her. He was in a radiant mood, and positively beamed with good humour. She knew without asking, that the sale had been effected entirely to her husband's satisfaction.

"It's all right," he said. "Dorrington has settled to buy the mare, and is sending over for her the first thing to-morrow morning. If any bother should arise later on, Margaret, mum's the word, remember. We know nothing whatever."

She looked at him, her eyes clouded by a world of reproach.

"Oh! Dick, how could you take such a boy as that in? You really ought to have told him the truth. He is little more than a child."

"Hang it all!" he burst out tempestuously, "how can poor devils like you and I afford to tell the truth on all occasions? Truth is a luxury, which rich people may indulge in to their hearts' content, but paupers, who hardly know how to keep a decent roof over their heads, are obliged to have recourse to prevarication now and again. Dorrington is made of money, and even if he should drop a bit over this deal, it won't hurt him. We must live somehow."

"It is the principle of the thing," objected Margaret.

"Principle be blowed! There is that infernal bill for forage, which must be met this day fortnight, and the men are clamouring for their

wages and will give warning if they are not paid. I tell you, if I had not managed to sell the mare well and got a little ready to go on with, we should have found ourselves in a very tight corner indeed. We can't be sentimental in the circumstances, besides, it's all rot your being so squeamish, Margaret."

She sighed and held her peace. Experience was fast teaching her the futility of protest. It seemed almost impossible to maintain the ideals of Right and Wrong instilled into her from her childhood. Her notions on these subjects were becoming revolutionized—if not confused. All the same, she dreaded the final results of Dick's transaction. Surely, Mr. Dorrington would take him to task sooner or later, and then, how could he defend himself?

Providence, however, was unusually kind to Master Dick for once. Only one more week remained of the hunting season, and not until the very last day did young Dorrington appear at the Meet, mounted on his recent purchase. He explained that the mare had been suffering from a slight cold since changing her stable, and he had consequently not deemed it prudent to hunt her sooner. The ground was parched for want of moisture. Overhead, an April sun shone brightly in the heavens. Already, the fields were dotted with frolicking lambs, and in the woods and coppices, the yellow primrose gleamed star-like from its surroundings of undergrowth. Grass covered the wide-stretch-

ing fields like a carpet of emerald velvet, brilliant in hue. Here and there, a shy daisy showed itself, white-leafed, pink-tipped, the sure precursor of spring. Nobody versed in vulpine lore ventured to prophesy that there could be a scent on so genial a morning. But there are some mysteries which man has never yet succeeded in fathoming. He still marvels, why hounds should run hard under, apparently, the most unfavourable conditions, when, on other occasions—the elements appearing conducive to sport—they fail to carry a head for a couple of hundred yards. To-day, with golden sunshine dazzling the eye, with dust flying about, blue sky, wild flowers and many other vernal signs detested by the fox-hunter, hounds were hardly to be kept within sight. At the first draw, they unearthed a stout, old, dog fox from his favourite haunts, and pursued him like demons, although he led them a pretty dance, over a most difficult line of country.

Margaret was mounted on a four-year-old, which she had never, hitherto, ridden, and her orders were not to bustle him and only to pop over an occasional gap. Consequently, she did not possess much chance of keeping in the first flight. No young animal could be expected to hold its own in so fast and prolonged a run. After trotting about the roads for the best part of an hour with the second horsemen, she took up a position on a commanding eminence and brought her baby to a standstill. From this

point of vantage, she obtained a magnificent panorama of the chase. The hounds were a long way ahead of the nearest horsemen. The huntsman and some half dozen, hard-riding companions were in most immediate attendance, and in their turn, they were followed by a long line of panting, heaving, struggling animals, jumping and galloping in the rear, according to the best of their ability. The pack headed straight towards Margaret, and as the speckled beauties approached, she espied young Dorrington well up with the leading division. But the mare looked as if she had shot her bolt. Her head drooped, her tail was outstretched, and foam covered neck and flanks. Margaret perceived at a glance that the animal was done to a turn. Before long, a stiff stake and bound fence marred the onward progress of the pursuers. There was absolutely no give about it. The obstacle required to be jumped cleanly, or else left severely alone. Little Dorrington's blood was up, and he had no intention of turning away, even although his mount gasped and gurgled for breath under him. If he had entertained any previous doubts as to the mare's wind, he was tolerably sure of her infirmity now. Although the noise she made was so slight as hardly to be noticed, it evidently affected her staying powers. She had carried him brilliantly for the first twenty minutes, but now she was rapidly dying away, and to lose his place resembled gall and worm-

wood. He was a plucky lad, devoid of fear, so disregarding the warning given by his steed, he crammed her at the fence without a moment's hesitation. She was as good and game a creature as ever looked through a bridle, but physical ailments affect even the most courageous spirit. She did not offer to refuse, but the effort demanded was too severe. She gave a convulsive buck, cleared the fence itself, but failed to get over an extra wide ditch on the off side. True, her forefeet landed on the grass, but both hind legs dropped backwards with a jerk. She tried gallantly to recover herself, but not succeeding in the attempt, rolled heavily over on her side. The poor thing seemed so blown, that she never endeavoured to rise, but lay where she fell, her rider pinned beneath her. At least, so Margaret surmised. But when the chase swept on, and the animal still remained motionless, she began to suspect all was not well. Calling for the assistance of a couple of labourers, she trotted down from her post of observation. It did not take the stout countrymen long to rescue young Dorrington from his uncomfortable position. During their operations, the mare behaved in the most exemplary manner and never stirred. The lad was considerably shaken by his fall, but fortunately, not seriously hurt. When he perceived Margaret, he smiled and said to her, "It was bad luck coming to grief."

"Very," she responded sympathetically,

“Especially, when you occupied such a foremost position. But accidents will happen in the hunting field. That is the worst part of the business.”

She looked narrowly at the mare, and added, “Why does not Brunette get up?”

“I expect she is terribly blown,” he replied. “I am ashamed to say, I was awfully hard upon her and rode her to the very last gasp. By the way, Mrs. Garrard, I have every reason to believe that my suspicions about her wind were correct, in spite of what your husband assured me to the contrary.” And he looked keenly at Margaret, as if seeking confirmation of his statement. She tried not to change countenance, but could feel herself crimsoning.

“Indeed!” she ejaculated faintly, keeping both eyes glued on the ground.

“Coom oop, old 'ooman, coom oop, will yer?” cried one of the labourers, giving the prostrate animal a friendly kick.

But she made not the slightest response to his exhortation. Whereupon, he bent down and inspected her more closely.

“By Gosh!” he exclaimed in consternation. “She's a ded'un, you may take my word for it. There ain't an atom of life left in her.”

“Nonsense!” ejaculated the owner incredulously. “You don't know what you're talking about, my good man.”

If Mr. Dorrington entertained any doubts on the subject, they were shortly put at rest; for

a minute or two later, a hard-riding veterinary surgeon appeared on the scene. On learning what had happened, he at once desisted from an already hopelessly stern chase and proffered his professional services. Alas! they were of no avail. After a brief examination, he pronounced that the mare had succumbed to a broken back. The spinal cord was severed, causing sudden death. The good brown mare had died gallantly in the hunting field, doing her utmost until the last, and no doubt, could she have been endowed with the gift of speech, she would have desired no more merciful or fitting ending. Far better than spending her declining days between the shafts of a cab, exposed to ill-treatment, scant food, uncomfortable quarters, neglect and uncongenial toil. Shall we mourn for thee, brave spirit, or congratulate thee on thy escape from a Future, which presents nothing, but a series of downward steps? How pitifully sad is the finish of many a noble hunter! It is terrible to dwell upon it, and upon the mean sordid side of human nature, which often will permit of an old favourite being sold into slavery for the trifling gain of a few pounds. Shame upon the man or woman who commits so despicable an act. If no home can be found, there is always the friendly bullet to fall back upon.

Tears rose to Margaret's eyes. At the same time, the thought flashed through the background of her mind, that her husband was

saved from exposure. As far as he was concerned, the mare's death would surely prove a blessing in disguise. A merciful providence had averted the consequences which she so greatly dreaded. Insensibly, she heaved a sigh of relief. How hateful it was to feel like this—ashamed, and yet glad of the misfortunes of another. She dared not look her companion in the face.

He was a tender-hearted lad and blamed himself for the unlucky occurrence.

"It was my fault," he said mournfully. "I drove the poor mare too hard. I deserve to be kicked for not easing her, when I found she had had enough. But you know how hard it is to give up your place in a good run."

"Yes, yes," said Margaret soothingly. "I can quite sympathise."

He turned and compelled her to meet his gaze.

"Look here, Mrs. Garrard," he said. "Now that the animal is dead, and it can't make much difference one way or the other, tell me honestly. 'Did you ever suspect her wind? I can believe what you say."

Once more the guilty colour flew to Margaret's cheeks.

"Yes," she admitted reluctantly, "I am afraid that I did. But," she made haste to add, "I am quite sure my husband thought the animal was perfectly sound, and naturally, I considered he must be a better judge than I."

She could not give Dick away, no matter how much she might secretly think him to blame for his conduct in the matter.

"Humph!" said young Dorrington. "It strikes me it is a case of the least said the soonest mended. But I paid a long price, and my confidence is a little shaken—a little shaken, Mrs. Garrard."

"Oh! please don't say that," she cried in distress. "We are very poor, and Dick says we must live somehow, but I am certain he meant no harm."

"I hope not," said the boy gravely. "But when next I want a horse, I shall come to you, not to Mr. Garrard. I feel sure you are to be trusted."

"Thank you," said Margaret humbly. "You—you are very kind."

But in spite of his assurance, she felt immeasurably abased. She and Dick were united. To cast doubts on the honesty of one was to place a slur on the probity of the other. That was inevitable. It might be said that they had got out of a bad scrape well, but this did not mend matters, when their reputation suffered. Margaret was far too sensitive and too much of a lady ever to derive happiness from the profession in which she had embarked. The petty deceptions, the subterfuges and trickeries of successful horse-dealing were peculiarly obnoxious to her candid nature. Her instinct was always to speak the truth, and

even the art of keeping silence required arduous cultivation. In her attempts to remain loyal to Dick, she frequently revealed more than was desirable, or than she intended. People seemed to possess a special knack of extracting the very secrets she most wished to conceal. How it came about, she hardly knew. Dick scolded her for her want of reticence. She could not help him in *his* way, and if she endeavoured to do so in her own, she invariably incurred his wrath. Her self-confidence was sadly shaken. To go through life as a failure was a miserable experience. Would she for ever have to look out at the world with apologetic eyes? At her age, it was hard—very hard.

CHAPTER VI

SIR REGINALD FARNDON

NOTHING now remained but to remove the saddle and bridle from the dead body of the brown mare, and make arrangements for her corpse to be conveyed to the kennels. After an interval, Margaret sorrowfully wended her way home. The four-year-old had been out long enough, and she had completely lost touch with the Hunt. So she bade Mr. Dorrington farewell, and set off. The Garrards were fortunate in one respect. They had a good landlord. Their little homestead belonged to a great county magnate, Sir Reginald Farndon by name. He owned a vast amount of territory, and was a staunch preserver of foxes. Although he did not hunt himself, he took a benevolent interest in the sport, and was exceedingly popular on that account. No longer young, he lived a somewhat secluded life. His only sister, Miss Sylvia, taking care of his establishment for him. For years, Sir Reginald

had been the target for every match-making mother in the country. His wealth was enormous, his position undeniable ; but somehow or other, he managed to avade all advances and remained a bachelor. Of course, rumour averred that he had met with a disappointment in his youth, but such excuses are ever forthcoming in the case of a rich and titled gentleman, who has the curious desire to maintain a life of single bliss, rather than fall a victim to the bonds of matrimony.

Miss Sylvia was a very haughty lady of the old school, who regarded modern manners, customs and fashions with peculiar dislike. She was several years older than her brother, and generally credited with exercising considerable influence over him. In fact, it was freely asserted that Sir Reginald would have taken a wife ere now, had he not been so well and jealously guarded by Miss Sylvia. She was very tall, very thin and carried herself like a queen. Most gracious, when not opposed, she liked her own way, and would brook scant opposition. Inside the house, she ruled with a rod of iron over the female domestics, and even Mrs. Trimmer, the housekeeper, quaked in her shoes, when Miss Farndon descended of a morning to the lower regions. Sylvia also had never married, but she gave people to understand, that it was not for want of opportunities, only on account of the great contempt in which, she held the inferior creature—Man

Her's was a strong and forcible personality, hedged round by many limitations however, unrealised by their possessor. She had always lived so safely, so comfortably and luxuriously, that to a certain extent, her sympathies had become blunted. She saw the world from her own point of vision, and was essentially a Christian gentlewoman, who held error and misdoing in such detestation, that she refused to make allowance for the temptations experienced by individuals less securely guarded than herself.

Sir Reginald rarely interfered with his sister. Possibly experience had taught him that if peace were desired, she was best left alone. They lived together in much harmony, and Miss Sylvia performed with great grace and dignity those social duties wherein the Baronet proved somewhat remiss. Her name figured as patroness of every County Bazaar and charitable entertainment. Where she could not subscribe in person she prevailed upon her friends and acquaintances to do so. Her days were thoroughly well-ordered. She gave treats to the school children, presented them with suitable presents from a tree at Christmas, actively supported the Church, and was a frequent communicant. Every now and again she issued invitations for a great and solemn dinner party to the most influential of her neighbours. Sir Reginald had a rooted dislike to these functions, but endured them with gentlemanly

resignation. According to their lights, both brother and sister did their utmost to set an example worthy of their wealth and position. But they were dull—undeniably dull. The great house wanted childrens' voices to liven it up, childrens' feet to resound along the untenanted corridors, and scatter dust throughout the vast, disused apartments.

When Dick Garrard first proposed taking Fernfield—as the house was named—Miss Sylvia did not at all approve of having so undesirable a tenant close to the Park gates. She did all she could to persuade Sir Reginald not to grant him a lease of the place, but for some occult reason, he declined to listen to her arguments, and as already seen, the Garrards were installed. But when the Baronet hinted to his sister that it would be only kind if she were to call on the young wife that lady flatly refused.

“I consider it a great mistake for me to mix myself up with common, horse-dealing people,” she remarked, haughtily. “In my opinion, *noblesse oblige*,” and she tossed her head on high.

“But really, Sylvia,” he urged, “it would not hurt you just to leave a card. You need not even go in, but Mrs. Garrard is a lady by birth, and the daughter of an old friend. I do think you might show her a little courtesy.”

“I cannot do better than follow the example of her own father,” retorted Miss Sylvia. “Depend upon it, Colonel Hope had excellent

reasons for casting her off. I am sorry for the misguided young woman' of course, but as she has chosen to occupy quite a different position from the one she was entitled to by birth, I fail to see how the neighbours can be expected to call upon her, or what good it would do, if they did."

"The poor thing seems very forlorn, and she does not look happy," said Sir Reginald, in rather a subdued tone, for Miss Sylvia was somewhat overpowering when she assumed her present attitude.

"Happy! No, I should think not. How could she expect happiness, when she has brought disgrace on her father's ancient name and allied herself to an underbred person only a few degrees removed from a groom? She don't deserve it."

"I think you are a little hard on her, Sylvia. She was too young to know anything of the world, and the man is an artful fellow, just enough of a gentleman to impose upon an innocent girl, who does not know a bounder when she sees him." And he looked towards his sister, hoping to perceive some signs of her relenting. But evidently Miss Sylvia did not consider the case deserving of compassion. She preserved a stern attitude of hostility.

"I really cannot pity any woman who makes such an utter fool of herself," she remarked in a judicial tone.

Seeing how hopeless were any efforts at per-

suasion, Sir Reginald desisted in his fruitless, but kindly attempts. He supposed that ladies regarded these things from a different point of view than men. From that time, however, he set about befriending Mrs. Garrard in a quiet, unostentatious fashion peculiarly his own. He had seen Margaret on several occasions, and pitied her from the bottom of his heart. She looked a mere child, and already her girlish face wore a pathetic expression which gave him pain. The beautiful eyes were much too wistful, and as the weeks passed, they became increasingly so. He called in person upon their owner, and was pleased with Margaret's modesty of manner and guileless conversation. She appealed to all that was manly and chivalrous in his nature. He had not sufficient moral courage openly to coerce Miss Sylvia, but now and again, when he was out walking, he determined to look Mrs. Garrard up, just so that she should not feel as if she were ostracized. Amongst other concessions, he gave her leave when returning from hunting to take a short cut through his Park. This was a valuable privilege, which she found most useful. By leaving the public road at a given point, it enabled her to save nearly a couple of miles, which proved an important consideration when riding a tired hunter.

On the present occasion, Margaret gladly availed herself of the Baronet's permission, and as she neared the massive iron gates of the

Park, the lodge keeper came out from her cottage and opened them. Margaret nodded her thanks and walked the four-year-old down the fine drive, which was bordered on either side by towering elms, just beginning to put forth buds. The sap was rising in them, and the mysterious stirring of Spring everywhere caused the earth to throb with a renewal of life. It was impossible to resist the influence of the balmy air and genial sunshine. After a cold and cheerless winter, they turned the land to gladness. It was good to live on such a day—good to be young and to feel oneself a part of wide-breasted Mother Nature. Margaret heaved a deep sigh of content. What matter if that content were purely physical instead of moral? It sufficed for the time being. Her lips parted in a smile. The sunshine was temporarily reflected in her luminous eyes. "How do you do, Mrs. Garrard?" cried a voice. And to her surprise, Sir Reginald stepped out from behind a dead tree, which, apparently, he was in process of cutting down, since he held an axe in his hand.

She blushed—a trick of hers when startled.

"Good afternoon," she said in response. "I hope I am not intruding?"

"Not in the least, Mrs. Garrard. I am only engaged in my favourite occupation of forestry. Have you had a good day's sport?"

"Yes," she answered. "To the best of my belief, the hounds have given the Field a

wonderful run. Unfortunately, I saw next to nothing of it, being only mounted on a four year old, which my husband said must not be hustled."

"Ah! Who would have supposed there could be a scent on such a heavenly day as this," he observed, with a pleasant smile.

"There was a burning one," she returned. "Nobody could live with the hounds. They simply ran away from their followers. Poor young Dorrington met with rather a nasty fall I am sorry to say."

"I regret to hear it," said Sir Reginald. "I trust he was not much hurt?"

"No, only shaken. Luckily, he did not break any bones. But he killed his horse. The poor thing broke its back. Mr. Dorrington only bought the mare from Dick a few days ago, and he is very much distressed."

"It was bad luck," said Sir Reginald sympathetically. "But better the horse should be injured than the rider." So saying, he approached a step or two nearer, and placing his hand on the four year old's mane, said,

"Tell me, how are you getting on yourself, Mrs. Garrard?"

"Pretty well, thank you," she said in confusion.

"That's right," he rejoined. "To tell the truth, I am glad of an opportunity of having a little chat with you. I wanted to ask, if, in my capacity as landlord, there is anything I

can do for you at Fernfield? I fear it is but a tumble down place at best, and there was no time to smarten it up for the reception of a lady after the lease was signed. Have you any complaints to make?"

"Oh! no," she answered hurriedly. "I should never dream of complaining. Dick says I ought to be only too thankful to have a roof of any kind over my head."

"Humph! Is that the way he talks?" inquired Sir Reginald indignantly.

"It must be hard for a man to be obliged to keep a woman as well as himself," said Margaret in extenuation, falling back on her husband's arguments.

"Nonsense," said the Baronet. "That is only what he expects to do once he marries. You have some funny ideas, my dear child."

"Have I?" she demanded innocently. "You know Dick is poor—horribly, awfully poor, at least so he declares, and it seems," she added, with a little catch in her voice, "that when he made up to me, he was under the impression I should have plenty of money, if not at once—at any rate—some day. It is only natural he feels dreadfully disappointed at my turning out a fraud."

"Hush! don't talk like that. I hate to hear you speak so. Most men would have considered they had gained a sufficient prize in securing your affections without any 'dot' whatever."

"I—I wish I had k—known beforehand,"

blurted out Margaret. "It makes me feel so horrid being a pauper, and of course I had no idea of Dick's expectations. It was not my fault. I am sure I never made any attempt to deceive him."

"Come, come, don't cry, child. Nobody blames you, except for being too confiding and impulsive, and those are the attributes of youth. Now think. Is there nothing—nothing you would like done at Fernfield?"

Margaret reflected for a few moments, then her face brightened.

"Since you are so very—very kind—" she began bashfully.

"Yes," he interposed in an encouraging tone. "Don't be afraid to make any request. What is it you would like done?"

"I should so like to have a new paper in my bedroom, Sir Reginald. The one that is there now is green, with a hideous gilt star. It is such an ugly, old-fashioned pattern, and as I lie awake, I keep counting the stars and they possess a kind of horrible fascination which I cannot resist. Yes, a pretty, pink paper would make the room look as cheerful again."

"You shall have it," he rejoined smilingly. "Will you choose it yourself or will you leave the selection to me?"

"I would rather you chose, if you please, Sir Reginald. Only if you don't mind its being pink, I shall feel very grateful. I think a pink bedroom always looks so nice, don't you?"

He shook his head and laughed. "I am afraid I have not thought much about such matters. But never fear. Pink it shall be and guiltless of stars."

"Thank you so much." Then a sudden thought struck her, and she added hesitatingly, "Will it be putting you to very great—expense, Sir Reginald. If so, please don't mind. I will try and bear with the gilt stars, I will indeed."

Again he laughed good-humouredly. There was something agreeably honest and fresh about this young woman. He liked her a great deal better than the fine, starchy dowagers who came to his dinner parties, or the up-to-date young ladies he met in society. This one's soul was as clear as a mirror. She spoke what she thought, and her lack of artificiality and simplicity were strong recommendations in Sir Reginald's estimation. Again he laughed.

"Don't be afraid, my dear child. The expense will not ruin me. Don't you think," he went on in a jesting tone, "that pink curtains would be nice as well? If I remember rightly the present ones are dark green—"

"And—*so* ugly," she interrupted eagerly. "They are perfectly hideous."

"Well! well! we will see about the curtains also." And he nodded pleasantly.

"Oh! please don't. I could not think of putting you to more expense on my account. I ought not to have said they were ugly."

"No doubt, you are perfectly right," he said, much amused. "And I am so glad to have found out your wishes. But now I must not keep you any longer. Good-bye, my dear child, good-bye." So saying, he raised his hat as courteously as if saluting a queen.

CHAPTER V

LITTLE JUDY'S APPEARANCE

THE summer wore on, and Margaret did not feel at all well. She greatly over-taxed her strength by being so constantly in the saddle, but having discovered her utility in his profession, Dick proved an uncommonly hard task-master. He sternly repressed any tendency to complain on her part, by asserting she was as strong as a horse and knew not what fatigue meant. It was no good her contradicting the statement. He declined to give credit to it, and denied her the possession or any physical ailments. In the end, Margaret hardly dared allude to the slightest feeling of indisposition. If she did, it only exposed her to his jeers. Dick's arguments were highly peculiar, and solely adapted to suit his own convenience.

“What nonsense!” he declared sarcastically. “A person who can get up before breakfast and ride about the greater part of the morning, surely cannot pretend she is too tired, when her

husband asks her to take a little horse exercise during the afternoon. It strikes me you can always do what you choose."

"Indeed, I can't, Dick," she protested. "And two blacks don't make a white. According to your theory, whatever amount of labour one performs should be promptly doubled. A woman, unfortunately, is not a multiplication table."

"Fiddledee! You are an adept in the art of prevarication. There is no greater mistake than for people to coddle themselves, especially when they are young. The habit is not only bad in itself, but apt to grow."

"I am sure nobody could possibly say I coddle," rejoined Margaret, the tears springing to her eyes. "To begin with, I don't get the chance. And it is not my fault if I feel bad now and again. It's my misfortune."

"Now, for goodness sake, don't start snivelling. That is a contemptible sign of weakness. I hate your crying women, without an atom of spirit."

She dried her eyes, and goaded by his reproaches, sought to make light of her physical sensations. She even endeavoured to persuade herself into the belief that his want of observation where she was concerned possessed certain advantages. He never noticed if she were fagged, looked her worst, and had no appetite. She thoroughly understood by now, that he regarded her as a beast of burden, and for it to

shirk any of its allotted tasks was excessively inconvenient to the person who set them. As long as she could possibly keep upright, she must. No excuses, no evasions would be accepted. But she paid the penalty. Nature always exacts it, when her laws have been defied. Margaret continued to ride all through the summer. The consequence was, her baby was born prematurely, and only survived his birth by a few hours. The mother's life hung on a thread for many days, but thanks to a naturally sound constitution, she pulled through in process of time. Her illness left her extremely weak, and henceforth her health was seriously impaired. She never fully recovered from the effects of her confinement. Nevertheless, as the weary years succeeded one another, several children made their appearance into the world, but by some fatality, they none of them lived for more than a few months. At the age of seven and twenty, she was still childless and had almost given up hope. Crushed by disappointment, hard usage, and suffering, both physical and mental, she degenerated into a faded woman, old before the days of her youth were past, and retaining, comparatively, but few traces of her former brightness and good looks. She had drained the cup of misery almost to the last drop. A more callous nature might not have pined so beneath Dick's marital treatment, but she was sensitive to a fault, and his stinging phrases and coarse utterances wounded her to

the quick. Never a day passed without his launching some dart, which sped quivering into the vitals of her being. She longed for Death as a happy release, but Death never comes in answer to entreaties, only when his presence is not welcome. Dick wished for a son to train in his own footsteps, and he constantly twitted her for having been unable to rear one. Of late, he had taken to drink, and was quite lost to any sense of justice. He seemed to take a special delight in making a scapegoat of his delicate wife. The blame of every untoward incident was invariably laid at her door. She was accustomed to being scolded, whether she deserved censure or not. And she bore his strictures meekly.

Perhaps, it might have been better for both had she asserted herself more, but having once obtained the mastery, Dick was not the man to forego any advantage. His mandates must be obeyed, no matter at what cost.

Margaret longed passionately to possess a living child, and every fresh birth, served only to intensify her maternal instinct. But disappointment appeared to be her doom. From delighting in riding, she got to hate it, especially as she considered it instrumental to her misfortunes. But whether Margaret Garrard liked horse exercise or not was absolutely immaterial. She *had* to take it. Exactly ten years from the date of her unhappy marriage, and when she had almost given up hope, a baby girl appeared

on the scene, who by some miracle survived. The mother's joy was unbounded. At last, she had something of her very own to love and cherish—something that would not fling jibes at her, and on which she could pour forth the wealth of affection so long diverted from its natural channel. The Doctor insisted on her keeping quiet for three whole months, and told Dick quite plainly to his face, that he would be guilty of the crime of manslaughter, if he attempted to put his wife upon a horse before that period had elapsed. He grumbled and growled but dared not disobey, especially as Sir Reginald backed the opinion of the medical man. Margaret kept her bed for over six weeks, and thoroughly appreciated the rest and comparative freedom from worry. The good Baronet had insisted on being allowed to furnish an efficient nurse, and it was a novel and luxurious sensation to the over-worked wife to be cared for, and waited upon. They were the happiest days she had spent since her marriage.

Dick was most indignant at the sex of the baby, and out of pure spite, insisted on christening it Judy. This was a great source of vexation to Margaret, who wished for a floral name such as Violet, Daisy or May. But Dick swore that Judy was quite good enough for a wretched, little, female child, and as usual, he carried his point. She never could resist him.

The expenses of their modest establishment were necessarily augmented, but thanks to

Margaret's participation in her husband's business, it was now in a thriving state. True, customers did not place much trust in Mr. Garrard's word, but they both liked and believed his partner. Dick attracted buyers by his fearless riding across country, and she secured them by her honesty and pleasant manner of dealing.

After the little one's birth, Margaret's health improved somewhat, and although far from strong, she was enabled to resume her customary avocations. She was much happier also, for now, when Dick spoke roughly and rudely to her, she could always steal upstairs to where her treasure lay in its cot, and bask in the sunshine of infantile smiles. They might not mean much to some mothers, but they meant a great deal to *her*. She simply worshipped the child, and as Judy grew older, she clung with reciprocating tenderness to her maternal parent. They were, indeed, a most devoted pair.

For the first few years, Dick professed to disdain his little daughter, and took hardly any notice of her whatsoever. But by degrees, it became evident, that Miss Judy was not a personage to be ignored with impunity. He was so accustomed to bullying his wife and making her yield to his wishes on all occasions, that it never entered his head to suppose, Margaret possessed a staunch champion in so small an ally. One day, however, he discovered the fact. Judy was then about eight years of age and tall

for her years. She was sitting in the parlour playing with her mother. They were seated at the table, building card castles, an innocent enough amusement, and had just succeeded in raising a magnificent erection to their mutual satisfaction. Margaret's arm encircled Judy's waist, and the child looked up with a smile of mingled love and triumph. Something in her expression annoyed Dick and filled him with an uneasy feeling of jealousy. With one sweep of his hand, he destroyed the castle, which had afforded them so much pleasure to build. Judy's expression changed from brightness to shadow.

"Come," he cried in a strident tone, which set Margaret's nervous system ajar. "None of that tom-foolery. Really, Margaret, you are getting incorrigibly lazy, sitting down to such nonsense at this hour of the day. I call it too bad, especially when you know that there are customers about."

"I did not know there was any one here," she said, with a sigh.

"Yes, Lord Ronald Shortley has just driven over, on purpose to see the chestnut horse with the wall eye. It seems he has taken a fancy to him."

"Well! he can see the animal cannot he?" queried Margaret.

"Of course, but he has made a special point of your riding him. Lord Ronald is somewhat nervous, as you know, and he fancies if you can

hold the chestnut, that, perhaps, he may be able to do so also."

"Bother the man," she muttered under her breath, but Judy's quick ears overheard the observation, and she at once threw herself into the breach.

"My mummy does not want to go," she said stoutly.

"That has nothing whatever to do with the matter," rejoined Dick, staring at his offspring, as if she were a curiosity. "Hold your tongue, Miss." Judy shook her head. "No, I shan't. Mummy's tired and does not want to go riding again; do you, mummy?" Thus appealed to, Margaret felt placed in an awkward dilemma. She had only just taken off her habit, and certainly did not care for the trouble of dressing again. Besides, she had a bad headache and did not feel at all well. The whole morning had been devoted to the exercising and displaying of horses. Often she wished that the equine beast had never been created. Again she sighed, more wearily than before.

"Can't you get someone else to ride the chestnut?" she asked.

"No, I can't," he answered brusquely. "You know as well as I do, that the infernal brute won't jump a stick when I am on his back."

"There's William," she suggested.

"You talk as if we had a dozen rough riders at our disposal. It so happens that William

has gone over to Farmer Sutton's to see about buying a stack of meadow hay, which he heard might be bought at a reasonable price. "Come," he added, in tones of authority. "Lord Ronald is waiting all this time. Make haste, and leave that miserable, little pampered brat alone for a while."

On hearing herself thus denominated, Judy's breast heaved with indignation. "I'm *not* a miserable, little pampered brat," she shouted out, her eyes flashing defiance. "It's horrid of you saying such things—horrid—horrid," her voice rising in an ever increasing crescendo pitch. "And what's more, I can't bear you."

"Hush! Judy," interposed Margaret, turning white with fear. "You must not speak to your father like that. It's not right."

"I can't help it," panted Judy hotly in return. "It's him who makes me. He may be as unkind to me as he likes, but I won't let him be unkind to my own precious Mummy. No, no, Mummy," as Margaret made a move. "Don't go, don't go."

"Damn the child," cried Dick. "What's come to her, I should like to know?"

"Nothing has come to me," rejoined Judy stoutly. "But my Mummy is tired, and she shan't go riding any more. So there!" And leaving her seat, she confronted Dick like a small tigress.

He was amazed at her spirit. Until to-day, he had looked upon her as a mere replica of her

mother, a creature to be coerced and tortured. He eyed his little daughter with growing attention, maybe with a feeling nearer to respect. But outwardly, he gave no sign of it. He only laughed ironically.

"Shan't!" he exclaimed. "That's a nice word for a little girl to use to her father. Clear out of this, I say." And he waved for Judy to depart. She disregarded the behest, and shut her little mouth with an obstinate determination worthy of her progenitor. It was a contest of will.

Dick brought his great fist down on the table with an oath. "Don't stand there, glaring at me like a wild beast. Leave the room."

But the fearless little creature only advanced a step nearer, and in passionate accents cried, "You are a bad man, a bad, bad man. You make my Mummy cry, and I don't want you here. Go away yourself. We were quite happy till you came."

Dick stared at the small object in sheer stupefaction.

There was a pause. Then Judy said triumphantly. "If you want anybody to ride the chestnut horse, I'll ride him."

"Pooh!" he returned contemptuously. "You can't."

"Yes, I can," she contradicted. "You ask William. I can sit over all the jumps just as well as a grown up person. William says so, anyway."

"Is this true, Margaret?" he inquired, appealing to his wife. He had taken so little interest in the child hitherto, that he knew nothing of Judy's pursuits and accomplishments. She was as a stranger to him.

"Yes," admitted Margaret apologetically. "I could not keep her off the pony's back. She's a born horsewoman, and inherits all your nerve and courage. It comes like second nature to her to ride. Already, she's a marvel for her age." Dick regarded the child with renewed interest. Looking ahead he perceived her uses. When she grew older, she might fill her mother's place and prove of service in a variety of ways. And she was pretty too; yes, decidedly pretty, with her flashing eyes and tawny mane of hair, although he had only just found it out. Meanwhile, however, the customer was waiting, and once more, he ordered Margaret to put on her habit and follow him into the stable yard. Then, Judy did a very naughty thing. Without a moment's warning, she snatched at his hand, and buried her teeth in the flesh of its knuckles. Dick yelled with the pain. A moment later, he picked her up and crushed her fiercely against his chest. She thought he was going to kill her. It seemed as if he were trying to squeeze all the breath out of her body. Young as she was, she learnt the meaning of brute strength and realized its power. Her heart beat fast, but she scorned to utter a sound, that might be

interpreted as a token of fear. On the contrary, she looked into his face and smiled, although her own was deathly pale. And as he caught the smile, he crushed her harder than ever, until, having spent his fury, he cast her from him, bruised, trembling, but defiant still, as far as outward appearance went.

"Little devil!" he ejaculated. "She's a perfect fiend. I wonder, who the deuce she takes after? She's not like you, Margaret."

"I always think she has your courage, Dick," said Margaret timidly.

"No, no," shouted Judy. "I'm like my Mummy. I wouldn't be like you for all the world," turning to her father. "You think you've frightened me, but you haven't—not a bit. That's not me."

"Was there ever such a wonderful little creature?" thought Margaret to herself. She would no more have dared to speak to Dick like that than fly. But, in spite of Judy's heroic defence, she had to obey her husband's commands, and go out into the yard.

Judy was left alone. At eight years of age, she had learnt a bitter lesson. She had learnt how absolutely powerless is feminine spirit when opposed to masculine strength. In crossing swords with brute force she realized the weakness of her sex. The experiment was not one to be repeated lightly.

CHAPTER VIII

A JUVENILE ROUGH RIDER

DIRECTLY after breakfast the next morning, Dick shouted out to Judy that he wished to see what she could do in the horsemanship line. The child was busily engaged at her lessons, which were conducted by Margaret according to the best of her ability. But when she heard her father's voice, nothing loath, she threw down her books and rushed downstairs. Her mother followed at a more leisurely pace. Dick's commands were law, and a few minutes later, the whole party adjourned to the stables.

William soon put a side saddle on the pony. He had taught Judy how to ride and was intensely proud of his pupil. He himself was a regular dare-devil on a horse, and the child's pluck won his heart from the commencement. They were firm friends, and William considered there was no one in the whole world to compare with Miss Judy. He smiled broadly on receiving the order, and lost no time in leading out

the pony. It was a stout, well-bred animal which Dick frequently used as a covert hack. At other times, it went in harness, but up to now its owner had no idea that it could jump. Indeed, he never took the trouble to find out whether the little animal displayed any aptitude for crossing a country. If it did, its value was naturally enhanced. Dick suddenly remembered that Lord Ronald Shortley was on the look out for a good, quiet pony to carry his youngest boy when he went a-hunting. If Judy could manage it, so ought a lad of eleven. Thus mused Dick. He thought nothing of depriving the girl of her favourite mount. Meanwhile, Judy leapt lightly into the saddle, disdaining assistance. Taking up the reins with the skill of a professional, she walked off towards the field, where the fences were located. Her father noticed approvingly that she sat perfectly straight, squared her shoulders, and brought her little elbows well into her sides.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, addressing his wife. "She has a thundering good seat for a young 'un. I wonder how she came by it."

"Wait until you see her go through her performances," said Margaret, with a mother's natural pride. "She does William the greatest credit."

At this, William showed a set of teeth, marred by several unsightly gaps. Like a good many well bred animals, the pony was a bit of a slug until roused. Judy was evidently ac-

quainted with its idiosyncracies, for she had furnished herself with a long and formidable cutting whip, belonging to her father. She administered one or two sharpish strokes to her steed, and kicked his fat side with her diminutive heel. This produced a certain effect. The pony shook his head, whisked his tail and rounded his back in remonstrance. Nevertheless, after some more persuasion he condescended to break into a trot. Judy scorned to bump in child fashion, but rose in the saddle with the precision of a grown up person. Not content, however, with so sober a pace, she once more brought the cutting whip down on the animal's shoulder, and persuaded it to canter. Catching the spirit of its rider by degrees, the pony began to wake up, and instead of lobbing along as if it were too much trouble to put one leg before the other, it now cocked its ears and strained at the bridle. Judy's eyes sparkled. The colour mounted to her cheeks. Her soft, wavy hair unfurled itself in her rear like a flag. She sat back, firm as a rock and supremely happy. It was easy to see that the child was thoroughly at home and knew no fear.

"By Jingo!" exclaimed Dick, in accents of gratification. "The queer little cuss can ride and no mistake. She's got it in her, that's very plain."

"There ain't many as can beat her, young as she is," chimed in Williams, his honest countenance illumined with a smile of pride.

"In another year or so, Miss Judy will take the shine out of a good many on 'em in the hunting field. You mark my words. Lor' bless the child," he added. "Look at her now, sir. She's a-going to jump."

As he spoke, Judy set the pony at a flight of bushed up hurdles. Big horses by the score had bungled at them 'ere now. The child and her small pony looked such diminutive objects as they went at them, that it seemed almost impossible they could clear so formidable an obstacle. But Blessings—for so she had christened her mount—had been over the hurdles many times already, and knew exactly what was expected of him. The clever little creature got well under before taking off, and jerking his hind quarters round in a talented, but unseating manner, got over without disturbing a twig. Judy sat him like a centaur, and never budged an inch.

"Bravo!" cried Dick, fairly astonished. "That was splendidly done."

Not content with this performance, Judy jumped every one of the trial fences, including timber and double. At the former, she pulled the pony back to a judicious pace; and at the latter, she would not permit any faster speed than a trot. Dick was amazed by the intuitive knowledge she displayed. No matter how well and patiently William might have taught his pupil, it was a gift of Providence to be able to handle an animal in such a thoroughly artistic

manner. He had been accustomed to look upon the pony as an obstinate brute, that required a good deal of coercion—not to say punishment, yet to his surprise, Judy appeared to be able to do precisely what she pleased with him. Altogether, Dick was uncommonly impressed by the display. He hinted as much to Margaret, who was very proud of her little daughter.

"I'll ask £60 for the pony," he said, "and write to Lord Ronald this evening. When he comes over here, Judy shall give him a show. If our girl can ride the little beast, surely his big boy ought to be able to do so."

"Don't turn Judy into a horse coper just yet," pleaded Margaret. "She is too young, and it is not good for the child to bring her into so much prominence."

But Judy's ultimate welfare was nothing to Dick. He thought only of his pocket and how he could benefit it.

"Hang it all!" he retorted irritably. "I cannot afford to keep a pampered child in idleness and luxury. If she can make herself useful, she must."

So, in spite of his wife's remonstrances, he wrote off the same afternoon to his noble client, and two days later, that gentleman called at Fernleigh, accompanied by his son, a pale, sickly-looking boy, small for his age and far from robust. Judy was mounted on the pony and made to show what it could do. Lord

Ronald warmly praised the girl's horsemanship and also expressed his admiration for "Blessings." Dick was highly delighted, particularly, as thanks to the excellent display made by his daughter, Lord Ronald ended by purchasing the pony. On learning later on, that her favourite was to quit the stables, Judy burst into tears. Then, Dick performed an unparalleled act of generosity. He actually patted her on the head and presented her with half-a-crown as a reward for her services. He further comforted her by declaring that, as she was getting a big girl, he would let her ride a horse like a grown-up person. This promise so flattered Judy, that after a few days had elapsed, she became resigned to the loss of "Blessings."

Henceforth, Dick turned over a completely new leaf, and from ignoring the girl completely, he now could not make enough of her. He was always talking about her horsemanship to his customers, and by his injudicious praise threatened to impair Judy's modesty. Margaret was greatly vexed. The chief aim and object of her life was to bring Judy up as a lady, and prevent her from succumbing to the horsey influences by which she was surrounded.

"Riding is not everything in life, my dear child," she would say to Judy. "Now that you are young, there are many other lessons to be learnt as well. I cannot bear the idea of

your growing up slangy and uneducated, and only a degree removed from a common rough rider. We must guard against that at all costs, dearest Judy." And she sighed, as she looked at the girl.

"I want to be a lady, mummy, I do indeed," said Judy earnestly. "Of course I see the difference between your ways and father's. I will always do what you tell me." And she pressed her round young cheek against Margaret's hollow one.

"Thank you, my darling," said her mother. "You are an inexpressible comfort to me. I can't think how I ever lived my life before you were born."

"Father has taken to liking me lately, because he thinks I can be of use to him," resumed Judy seriously. "But you have liked me always. *You* like me for myself, don't you, mummy dear?"

"Yes, yes," said Margaret in a muffled voice. "My little treasure! I do so want to guard and shield you from all harm and to make your childhood happy. For," she concluded mournfully, "nobody knows what may happen after. Her youth may prove the only happy time of a woman's life. It is often the case."

"I always feel good and happy when I am with you, mummy."

"That's right, darling. Sometimes, I am afraid you must think me harsh and tyrannical. I know that it is pleasanter for you to go to the

stables and ride about all the morning than to sit at home, poring over a tiresome lesson book, but I have only your welfare at heart, my dear little Judy."

The child knew that her mother spoke the truth. Although her father now took a great deal of notice of her, she never felt thoroughly at ease in his presence. His loud voice, inconsiderate ways and coarse oaths jarred her susceptibilities. She had inherited much of Margaret's refinement and sensitiveness. Unfortunately, as the days passed, Dick discovered a fresh way of torturing his wife. He was jealous of Judy's devotion to her mother, and sought by every means in his power to transfer the child's affections to himself. He set about this in a most subtle and insidious manner. If Judy wanted any little pleasure or indulgence, he told her she must look to him for its gratification, since he held the purse strings. She was taught to apply to him for the merest trifle, and that he alone could dispense favours. As much as possible, he prevented mother and daughter from being alone in one another's society. By a variety of underhand means, he endeavoured to weaken Margaret's power and to take Judy's love from her. But he did not succeed. With the unerring perceptions of youth, the child distinguished between her real and her false friend. The greater his efforts to win her favour, the more did she shrink from him. Even in his most amiable moods, he

was antipathetic to her. All her worst passions seemed dragged to the surface in his presence. He did not appeal to what was good in her nature, but on the contrary, only to the bad. With her mother, the case was quite different. Perfect sympathy existed between them. Never had a harsh word been exchanged on either side. Each reposed absolute confidence in the other. All attempts to destroy the good understanding between them were futile. They only created pain and placed Judy in an awkward position. She dreaded and feared her father, as much as she honoured and respected her mother. It was not long before the quick-witted girl discovered she was being used as an instrument wherewith to torture the parent she loved best. Margaret said nothing. How could she? To appeal to Dick's sense of justice was hopeless; to complain to Judy undignified. Silence was the only course to pursue. But in seeking to estrange Judy, Dick wounded his wife more cruelly and more deeply than on any previous occasion during their married life. Margaret saw only too clearly how bad the state of friction in which they now lived was for her daughter. It placed the poor child in a most embarrassing position, and its effect must ultimately prove demoralizing. As things were, if Judy pleased one parent, she vexed the other. It was wicked for a young girl to be exposed to such a dilemma. Sooner or later,

it must induce reserve, subterfuge, or deception. And, as we know, of deception Margaret had a horror. Looking ahead she could see but one way out of the difficulty. Judy must leave home and the pernicious influences to which she was there exposed. The next few years were crucial ones, calculated to make or mar her life. If her character were once formed, she might be strong enough to resist evil. At home, she had nothing good to learn. Insensibly, Margaret's thoughts reverted to Highburgh House, conducted by younger and more able management than in her day. She even went the length of writing to the principals and inquiring their terms. But on receiving them, her heart sank. It would take a hundred a year at the very least for Judy to become enrolled among the pupils. And where was she—Margaret—to get a hundred a year from? She had not a penny in the wide world of her own. Even if she wanted a new dress, or money wherewith to pay the household expenses, she had to beg a few sovereigns of Dick, which were so grudgingly doled out that to ask for them became more and more disagreeable. And if she communicated her plan to him, the chances were he would flatly refuse to let Judy leave home. He would certainly say he could not afford to pay for her schooling. Margaret perceived endless difficulties ahead, and ponder over the situation as she might, she did not see a way to obtaining her heart's

desire. Bitterly did she regret not having profited more by the educational advantages conferred upon her in her youth. Had she only chosen, she might have learnt a good deal during her stay at Highburgh House, but she had never cared much for book-learning, and idled away a lot of her time. Her knowledge on many subjects was limited, and already she had imparted the bulk of her modest acquirements to Judy. She felt herself incapable of carrying on her daughter's education much further. True, she might engage a daily governess, but they were difficult to find, and then, there was always—Dick. She should not like any one from the village to see him, when he was in one of his bad fits and had been drinking. At such times, he used dreadful language, quite unfit for female hearing. If the report got about, that her husband had taken to liquor, it would spell ruin for their business. So far, she had contrived to conceal his infirmity from the public. Even Judy did not know of it as yet, although Margaret daily feared detection in that quarter. Hitherto, she had bundled the child out of the room before her young ears were shocked. But sooner or later, she would learn the truth. If Judy spent most of her time from home, she would be spared much that was unpleasant, much that was even worse—wrong. Theirs was no house for a young girl to dwell in. Poor Margaret was only too painfully conscious of that fact.

CHAPTER IX

“IMPERATOR”

GREAT joy reigned in the establishment. Dick announced his intention of going away for a whole week. He intended paying a visit to Ireland for the purpose of purchasing young horses. It was spring time, and he liked getting them in early, so as to give them a summer's conditioning before the next hunting season came round. Dick was a good judge of horse-flesh, and as he went to out of the way parts, little frequented by the ordinary dealer, he often succeeded in picking up valuable animals at a comparatively low figure. Margaret hailed his rare absences with intense inward satisfaction. She then had Judy all to herself, and they could indulge in a variety of innocent recreations, denied to them when the master of the house was at home. She dutifully packed her husband's portmanteau, feeling guiltily conscious of the great sense of relief engendered by his impending departure. Nevertheless, she ne-

glected none of his requirements, and when he left, he wanted for nothing, even a luncheon basket, daintily stocked, being provided. But as soon as his back was turned, a purer atmosphere seemed to permeate the place. Windows were thrown open, tobacco smoke and whisky fumes got rid of, the rooms thoroughly cleaned, and peace reigned within and without. Margaret breathed freely, and felt like an individual, instead of a crushed nonentity, not permitted to enunciate a single opinion of her own. Liberty was a new and glorious sensation to the poor, down-trodden wife. She did not lack for employment, since the stables were entrusted entirely to her care. There were always horses to exercise, and letters to answer, in addition to her daily round of household duties. Judy proved most helpful and was a great comfort to her mother.

One fine afternoon—no customers having given notice of their arrival—they went for a walk together. The weather was splendid, and almost as warm as in midsummer. Judy caught sight of a yellow blaze of primroses in a coppice, to which, they had directed their steps. She uttered a cry of delight and ran off in great glee to pick a big nosegay. Whilst her little daughter was thus happily engaged, Margaret sat down on a stone heap by the side of the road and waited patiently. The sun shone genially upon her, and its exhilarating rays thrilled her being and filled it with a pleasing physical

comfort. They made life appear more endurable than usual. Her thoughts reverted to Judy, and the extreme importance of obtaining some better education for the girl than she was at present receiving. And as she meditated on the child's home surroundings, which by rights should have been happy and inspiriting, all unconsciously, the salt tears welled up into her eyes and found their way softly and silently down her cheeks. She heeded not their presence, being too absorbed by the solemnity of her reflections.

Suddenly, she became aware of the withdrawal of the sunshine. A long shadow darkened the road and intercepted the brilliant light. Looking up hastily, she perceived the cause. Before her, stood Sir Reginald Farndon. His steady gaze expressed both commiseration and concern. A big unrestrainable tear fell with a splash upon her folded hands, from which the gloves were withdrawn. Thin and worn as they were, their slender fingers and tapering nails proclaimed them to be the hands of a lady born and bred. Margaret wiped the tell-tale moisture from them, with a shame-faced gesture. Without invitation or formality, he seated himself on the heap of stones by her side, as if it were the most natural action in the world. She was crying—therefore unhappy, and he wanted to know the cause. These two were excellent friends, and ever since her marriage, he had gained Margaret's heartfelt gratitude by his

consistently kind and respectful treatment. If others slighted her, he had never done so. Many a time, but for Sir Reginald, she would have felt desperately lonely. For unless she chose to associate with inferiors, she was out of everything that went on in the county. There were no social meetings, no pleasant little tea or dinner parties for *her*. The ladies stood aloof, and contented themselves with a formal salutation when they met in the hunting field. To this day, Miss Sylvia remained almost a total stranger. But Sir Reginald was quite different from his sister. Nothing could exceed his courtesy and consideration. Looking back on the past, she acknowledged gratefully, that he alone had saved her from feeling an utter pariah. But for his helping hand, she would have fared badly. From the early days of her marriage, he had appeared to take an interest in her affairs, and insensibly she got into the way of appealing to him for advice and support. And he never failed to give them. Little by little, a genuine friendship sprang up between them. Whenever Margaret alluded to her troubles, Sir Reginald invariably listened sympathetically. Neither could she forget how good he had been at the time of Judy's birth. But for his care in providing a competent nurse, she might have spent the remainder of her days as a hopeless invalid. Dick would have left her to shift anyhow. The sufferings of others did not affect him.

He enjoyed extraordinary health himself and could not understand illness. With his wife's ailments, he had no patience.

Margaret greeted Sir Reginald with a struggling smile and wished him good afternoon. As already seen, the baronet had taken a fancy to her from the first. No semblance of flirtation entered into their relations. She was a married woman, with all the sportiveness crushed out of her. Indeed, her husband had contrived to inspire her with a nervous dread of the sex to which he belonged. As a rule, she infinitely preferred the society of women, but her present companion made her acknowledge the gulf that existed between a good man and a bad. They could not be placed in the same category. The Baronet commanded esteem, and she never felt safer than when beneath his protecting wing. He was a gentleman in ever sense of the word—one who scorned to take advantage of a woman's weakness—upright, chivalrous and honourable. Their friendship was absolutely platonic. But in spite of this fact, when in Margaret Garrard's society, Sir Reginald experienced a vague and indefinable feeling for which he was at a loss to account. It was a kind of feeling that, if she had been free, if they had chanced to meet at a suitable period in both their lives, if—if. But he never got further than—if.

He only knew that some people were essentially antipathetic to him, others proved the

reverse. There was something in her simplicity, her innocence, her forlorn condition, which appealed mysteriously to his instincts. A subtle affinity subsisted between them, which neither sought to analyse, but of whose presence, each was secretly aware. It rendered their intercourse pleasant, and that sufficed. Neither would have approved of closer intimacy. Sir Reginald answered Margaret's greeting in friendly fashion and looked at her with quiet, searching eyes. He assumed that some fresh trouble disturbed her serenity, and at once inquired into the cause.

"What is the matter now?" he asked, with direct straightforwardness.

"Nothing," she answered mendaciously, a faint blush colouring her cheek.

"Am I to believe that or not, Mrs. Garrard?" he persisted gravely.

"Well! no, not exactly. The truth is, I was thinking about Judy."

"Ah! little Judy. What of her? Is she with you to-day?"

"Yes, she is picking primroses in the wood. I ought to be helping her, but stooping makes my back ache so badly, and it is good for children to learn how to amuse themselves. Don't you think so, Sir Reginald?"

"Yes, I suppose so. But tell me Mrs. Garrard, why these tears?"

"I cannot help thinking about her future," answered Margaret. "Judy is getting a big girl,

and one has to look forward where the young are concerned."

"That is true. How old is she?" he queried.

"She will be nine at the end of this month," responded Margaret. "I have already taught her what little I know myself, but alas," she went on, in accents of despair. "I never fully realised how dreadfully ignorant I was until I began to teach." And she sighed heavily.

"You have not much time at your disposal, I daresay?" he said gently.

"No; but I could make time, only I am such a terrible dunce. Judy knows how to read and write, and can say her Catechism and multiplication tables. I have also taught her to sew and cook and make herself useful about the house. But I want her to be something better than a mere household drudge or rough rider."

"You are quite right," he assented. "It seems to me, however, that as far as it goes, you have given your daughter a most useful—not to say—comprehensive education, conducted on sound lines."

"I have tried my best," said Margaret, "But Judy's education ought to go further. And then, you know, Sir Reginald, although perhaps, I ought not to say so, our house is not quite—quite suitable for a young girl. It did not matter so much when the child was little, but there are too many men about, for a girl just beginning to get self-conscious and eager for praise."

"I understand," he said. "Don't distress yourself by explanations. The situation is plain, and you are right, perfectly right to remove her from the influences of horse and stable for the next few years. Judy is a sharp little monkey. But what do you propose to do with her, Mrs. Garrard?"

"I wish, Oh! how I wish that I could send her to school," confessed Margaret.

"To school!" he echoed in surprise. "How can you bear to part with her? She is the only bright spot in your life. I beg pardon," he added hastily. "I mean that, you and she are more than ordinary mother and daughter."

"I must not think of myself in the matter, Sir Reginald. I do not wish to be selfish, if I can help it. I want only to think of Judy's good and what is best for her in the long run. It does not do to take narrow, personal views in such a case. I would endeavour to bear her absence."

"You speak bravely. But where do you propose sending the child?"

"Ah; that is just the point that makes me so unhappy. I cannot send her anywhere. I wrote to Highburgh House—the school where I was myself—but their terms are so dreadfully high." And once more the tears rose to her eyes.

"May I ask what you call high?" he enquired.

"A hundred a year without extras. It is

out of the question. Dick would never dream of paying away so much money for his daughter's education. Besides," she concluded, with irrepressible bitterness, "he has taken to using her as a decoy to attract customers of late."

"That is shocking," said Sir Reginald emphatically. "Judy is much too young to be employed in such a manner."

"I know how bad it is for her," agreed Margaret. "She is already too precocious for her age, and ought to associate with children instead of grown up people. All this makes me realize she should go away from home. At the present moment, I would sell my soul to be able to manage it."

There was a pause, during which, her companion thought steadily. Presently, he broke the stillness by saying, "I will help you, Mrs. Garrard. I should like to."

"You!" she exclaimed, the colour rushing in a crimson wave to her cheeks. "Oh! no. You have been too good already. I must not accept more benefits."

"Nonsense," he rejoined, with calm authority. "Judy is a very bright, engaging child, and I have always taken great interest in her. She has a singularly nice nature, and we must not allow it to get spoilt—"

"She is exposed to so much temptation at home," interrupted Margaret. "That is what alarms me. She may or may not be strong enough to resist evil, God only knows. I do

so want the child to have a happy youth. The years pass so quickly, and once she marries, it may never be the same again."

"Poor soul!" thought Sir Reginald to himself, but he would help her out of the difficulty. Money was nothing to him. He was so rich, that he never spent anything like his income. A hundred pounds was a mere trifle. He might just as well give it to Margaret as to a hospital. As long as it did good, he did not mind. He should never miss the sum; but to the troubled, anxious woman at his side, it meant the fulfilment of her heart's desire. His resolution was taken on the spot.

"Look here," he said, with a smile illuminating his benevolent features. "If you can persuade your husband to let Judy go to Highburgh House, I promise to defray all the expenses of her education. There! is that a bargain?"

She turned and looked at him. Her eyes were dim, her voice thick.

"God's holy blessing rest upon you, Sir Reginald. It is not for myself—but to save a young life—a pure, fresh, beautiful soul from destruction—" She stopped short. Words failed to express her gratitude.

"I can never thank you," she resumed, after a short silence, "never—never."

"I don't want thanks," he said softly. "It is a pleasure to me to give. Hulloa," he ejaculated, glad to change the subject, "here

is my friend, little Judy herself," as the child approached, laden with flowers. "Come and say how do you do." And he held out his hand encouragingly.

Her straw hat dangled carelessly at the back of her head, her rosy lips were parted in pleasure, showing the small white teeth behind them, her countenance shone with good humour and health. She stood smiling at him, on straight, well-formed legs—a pretty picture of innocent childhood. Sir Reginald drew her towards him and kissed her. She returned the embrace trustfully.

"Well! Judy," he cried gaily. "I need not ask how you are. You look radiant with health and spirits. Come and tell me all your doings."

"See what a lovely lot of primroses I have got, Imperator," she said, thrusting a huge bunch of the sweet flowers under his nose. Don't they smell good?"

"Imperator!" he exclaimed. "That is a new name. May I ask its meaning?"

"Mummy has been reading to me about the great Roman emperors," rejoined Judy gravely. "There was a picture of one of them in the book. His name was Julius Cæsar, and directly I saw it, I said to mummy. 'Why! he's just like Sir Reginald.' So now, I shall always call you 'Imperator.'"

The Baronet laughed heartily. Perhaps he was even a little pleased by the child's un-

conscious flattery. He put his hand up to his nose and stroked it.

"You have a beautiful Roman nose, exactly like Julius Cæsar's," continued Judy, proud of an opportunity of airing her knowledge, "and you are tall and have the carriage of an emperor. I said so to mummy, didn't I, mummy?" appealing to her mother, and bestowing another kiss upon the imperial object of her admiration. "Hush! Hush! Judy," said Margaret. "You are talking nonsense."

"No, I'm not, am I, Imperator?" she said, with a fascinating mixture of childish simplicity and audacity. "You will let me call you Imperator, won't you?" He took her little hand in his and pressed it. "You shall call me what you please, my dear. Indeed, I am very proud of being likened to a Roman emperor."

"There! Mummy," cried Judy triumphantly. "You see he does not mind. He does not mind one little, tiny, weeny bit."

CHAPTER X

THE CHRISTIAN WOMAN

“No,” said Sir Reginald, with a broad smile. “I don’t mind in the least. On the contrary, I rather enjoy your personal remarks. They are delightfully refreshing. Have you any more to make, Miss Judy?”

“Yes,” she promptly made answer, “I have. Where did you get your nice white hair from? It shines just like silver in the sun. What makes it so white, Imperator?” And she stroked it with juvenile familiarity.

“Age, my dear,” he laughingly replied, “Age and infirmities. But really, you must not pay me any more of your extravagant compliments, or I shall go home quite conceited.”

The child screwed up her nose and looked at him intently.

“No, you won’t,” she contradicted. “You’re much too sensible. Mummy says only foolish people fancy themselves. And you are not foolish, are you?”

"I hope not," he replied, much diverted by the conversation. "I try not to."

She fumbled at her nosegay and pulled out one of the finest primroses, thereby considerably deranging the symmetrical arrangement of the entire bunch.

"Here is a beauty for you," she said, tendering him the flower. "Put it in your button hole and make yourself look smart."

He docilely performed her bidding. When the operation was concluded to their joint satisfaction, Judy resumed with childish gravity,

"I can't give you any more out of this bunch, because it is for my mummy. I picked it on purpose for her, but I will gather you another nosegay all to yourself, which you can take home with you, if you like." So saying, she darted back to the coppice, in a high state of glee, charmed by the generosity of her intentions. Sir Reginald watched her girlish form till it disappeared from vision in a tangle of undergrowth and tree stems.

"Judy is a charming child," he observed in all sincerity, turning to Margaret. "She has the most fascinating little ways about her, and I predict will break many hearts when she grows up. Men will find her a regular sorceress."

"I am glad you think well of her," said Margaret. "I feared you would consider it forward, her daring to bestow a nick name upon you. But children are irrepressible creatures," she concluded with a faint attempt at apology.

"And a good thing too," he rejoined, "They would lose half their freshness and originality if they did not blurt out all their thoughts on slightest provocation. That is what makes their society so delightful."

"You really do bear a curious resemblance to the portrait in the book," remarked Margaret, bestowing a close scrutiny upon her companion. "I saw it directly Judy pointed it out, but of course, I never thought for an instant, that she would call you 'Imperator' to your face."

"Better to my face than behind my back," he returned, with a laugh. "Don't check the child's fancies, Mrs. Garrard. They are perfectly harmless. I don't wonder you are proud of your daughter. Since we are on the subject of personalities, do you know that she has your eyes and hair?"

Margaret blushed involuntarily, and murmured something inaudible.

Sir Reginald relapsed into silence. A dreamy expression stole over his countenance. Perhaps he was thinking what a much happier man he would have been had a gentle wife presided over his household, instead of his spinster sister, Miss Sylvia, and how different the big house would have seemed, filled with gay, chattering children. A vague longing arose within him, mingled with a saddening conviction, that he had failed to extract from Life its best and sweetest portion. It was too

late now to make amends or rectify the error. As Judy had truly observed, his hair was white, and although free from physical infirmities—thanks to an unusually robust constitution—he could not put back the hands of the clock. He was sixty-three years of age. By an odd coincidence, his birthday fell on the same day as the child's. He would remember it, and make her a handsome present. She would soon be old enough to appreciate the uses of a gold watch. She should have one. He sat and talked fitfully to Margaret until Judy reappeared in triumph and stuffed a nosegay of primroses into his hand.

“There!” she cried in tones of elation. “That is for you—for your very own self. I picked it on purpose, so you must not give it away to anybody else.”

“I should not think of doing such a thing,” he said, patting her head in a paternal fashion. “I don't get such nice presents from little girls everyday, and when I do, I look upon them as keepsakes.”

“That's right,” Judy said thoroughly reassured, and by way of expressing her confidence in his statements, she scrambled unceremoniously on to his knee and rested her head against his shoulder. She was a little tired after her exertions, and sat quietly, while he wound a protecting arm round her waist. It was long since Sir Reginald had experienced a sensation of such pure and unalloyed happiness. The

girl's trustfulness appealed to the most sacred depths of his nature. He was stirred in an inexplicable manner. He would not suffer Margaret to check the child's flow of innocent conversation. He positively seemed to revel in her artless utterances, and encouraged her to give free expression to them. The sun shone gaily down upon the trio, with the same fine impartiality as if they had been a family of tramps reposing their wearied limbs by the road side. He peered through the interstices of the spreading tree overhead, and cast lights and shades upon their countenances, one moment turning the woman's hair to gold, another reducing it to a rich chestnut tint. High up in the Heavens, a lark, invisible to human eye, poured forth a very rhapsody of song, echoed far beneath him by whistling thrush and piping blackbird. Bees were already busy, flying far in search of sweet honey-making materials. As if tired of the boisterous storms of winter, nature hailed the advent of spring in the most radiant and placid of moods. Everywhere the fair green landscape basked contentedly beneath the sun's glorifying beams. To all, they gave comfort, warmth, life.

Presently the sound of approaching wheels became audible. It broke the spell, and Sir Reginald uttered a slight exclamation of annoyance. He had no false shame about him. He was a man of simple mind, and—as

far as was consistent with his wealth—of simple habits. To be caught sitting on a stone heap conversing with the wife and daughter of his tenant, did not strike him as an action calculated to provoke comment; but it must be confessed, his serenity received a decided shock, when, who should drive by in a big barouche drawn by a pair of sleek horses, but sister Sylvia. She was clad in her best apparel, and seated in solitary state, intent on paying an afternoon call to a distant neighbour. Her eagle eye alighted sternly on the unexpected apparition of her brother. Without a moment's hesitation she called out sharply to the powdered footman on the box, and directed him to tell the coachman to stop. The carriage was brought to an immediate standstill. Hastily slipping Judy off his knee, Sir Reginald rose to an upright position. The stone heap was dusty and it had left its mark upon his clothes. Miss Sylvia gazed first at her brother, then at Margaret with growing indignation. So this was how they spent their afternoons, and in Mr. Garrard's absence too! She never did believe in these meek, demure, tearful kind of women. They had a singular knack of taking men in, and getting what they could out of them.

“Ahem!” she exclaimed severely. “I thought you had gone out for a walk, Reginald. When I asked you to come with me, you pretended you were very much engaged, and

had made an appointment with Gowan to go over the home farm."

"So I did," he answered, with a heightened colour. "But as you perceive, I happened to meet Mrs. Garrard and her little girl, and stopped to talk to them."

"Happened to meet!" ejaculated Miss Sylvia, in a tone which made Margaret's blood curdle. "Chance and inclination have a singular habit of going hand in hand."

So saying, she slightly inclined her head in Margaret's direction. It was the haughtiest and most supercilious of acknowledgments.

She highly disapproved of the interest Sir Reginald took in his tenant's wife. She had set her face against it from the first, and thought the regard he displayed for her welfare truly ridiculous. Indeed it both annoyed and angered her. She counteracted the impression produced by his conduct by treating Margaret with extra frigidity, so as to give her to understand that, in spite of her brother's folly, she must never venture to presume. All these years she flattered herself on keeping the woman at arm's length. It was a terrible shock to her feelings to discover Sir Reginald seated familiarly on a stone heap by the person's side, dandling her brat of a child on his knee. Miss Sylvia disliked children, and had never even spoken to Judy. But it argued a degree of familiarity—not to say intimacy—on his part, which came as a cruel revelation. As

for Margaret, she bowed her head in confusion before Miss Sylvia's arrogant glance. Without exactly knowing why, it made her feel horribly guilty. All the world might overhear her remarks to the Baronet. Her conscience was at ease on that score; nevertheless, she instinctively realized that his sister regarded her as an object of suspicion. She wondered whether he would tell her that he had promised to pay a hundred a year in order to permit of Judy going to school? If so, Miss Sylvia would dislike her more than ever. She almost wished she had not divulged the source of her trouble. Miss Sylvia frightened her terribly.

"As you have not chosen to keep your appointment, you had much better come with me to call on Lady Highem," continued Miss Farndon, after a somewhat disagreeable silence. "You owe her a call, Reginald, and she is always pleased to see you. It is ages since you went there last."

"Thank you," he responded, "but I am not dressed for the occasion."

"Pooh! that does not signify. You have on a very nice country suit. It only wants dusting. James," she called out to the footman. "There is a clothes-brush under the front seat of the carriage. Take it out and give your master a good brushing. His back is all over dust."

Thus exhorted, James proceeded to obey and Sir Reginald found himself subjected to

most vigorous handling. He was glad to escape from James's cleansing.

"Thanks," he cried. "That will do—that will do nicely."

"Jump up," said Miss Sylvia in her most peremptory tone.

She was not going to leave her brother there exposed to the wiles of that hypocritical, dangerous Garrard woman—not likely. Anybody could get round him. He was so simple and believed everything people said. But for her, he would for ever be falling a victim to a whole host of impudent impostors. It really was a mercy he had a sensible person like herself to look after him. So Miss Sylvia opined. Possibly, she underrated his abilities a trifle. Sir Reginald stood for a moment, undecided what course to pursue. Should he brave a scene and break out into open revolt, or not? He came to the conclusion that he would best serve Mrs. Garrard's interests by not provoking his sister to any act of public hostility. But if there was one thing he hated more than another, it was paying calls with Sylvia and listening to the gossip—not always good-natured—which formed a principal feature of these occasions. He cast a comical glance of resignation in Margaret's direction. Miss Sylvia intercepted and resented it.

"Jump up," she commanded, more authoritatively even than before.

This time, he obeyed. Clearly, she was in

no mood for procrastination, and innocent as were his actions, he knew how capable she was of misconstruing them. So, he seated himself reluctantly by her side, and she bore him away in triumph. He braced himself to endure the coming ordeal as best he might. In almost absolute silence, he listened to her abuse of Margaret, her suspicions and accusations. Only, when Miss Sylvia had well nigh spent the torrent of her wrath did he turn upon her and say with feigned calmness.

"You call yourself a Christian person, yet you not only impute bad motives to your own brother, but also take delight in tearing to pieces the character of a hardly-used and innocent woman. Shame upon you, Sylvia."

At this rebuke, his sister relapsed into silence, which continued unbroken until they pulled up in Lady Highem's Park. Looking back on the drive and comparing it with his stone heap experiences, the Baronet had no hesitation in deciding which were the happiest of the two, and which possessed the best and most softening influences. The "Christian" woman defeated her own object by the sharpness of her tongue, the censoriousness of her judgments, and the narrowness of her views. Pity that they so often do.

CHAPTER XI

ASTONISHING THE FIELD

ALTHOUGH Sir Reginald might appear to bend to the storm, in reality he remained inflexible, and Miss Farndon's antagonism only rendered him the more determined to keep his promise to Margaret. He wrote the very next day to the principal of Highburgh House, inquiring when Judy Garrard could be received, and that lady replied that she could make a vacancy almost immediately, in order to oblige the Baronet. Nothing now remained, but for Margaret to obtain her husband's consent to the child's removal. Directly Dick returned, she lost not a moment in broaching the subject. At first, he would not hear of the proposition in any form, declaring that Judy was far too useful at home, and he could not possibly spare her. But Margaret pointed out, how deeply he would offend Sir Reginald, were he to refuse his kind and generous offer, and how inconvenient it might prove, if their landlord were

to refuse to renew their lease. This argument carried weight. Having cleverly introduced the thin end of the wedge, Margaret proceeded to show how great a gainer he would be, since all cost of his daughter's maintenance would henceforth devolve upon Sir Reginald. Once convinced that Judy's absence would benefit, instead of injuring his pocket, Dick offered no further opposition. In short, by the exercise of considerable tact, Margaret finally gained her desire. She worked her fingers to the bone making ready the girl's modest outfit, and many a tear did she shed in the process. When it came to the point, her courage very nearly broke down. She dared not contemplate the future, deprived of Judy's comforting presence. But the child cheered her by saying there would be many holidays, and as Highburgh House was so close to her home, she could often get away on a Saturday afternoon. Judy was vastly excited at the prospect of being transferred to fresh scenes and having companions of her own age to play with. When the appointed day arrived, Margaret drove her little daughter over to her new abode, and after a tearful farewell, returned in solitary glory. Her heart was heavy within her.

For days afterwards she went listlessly about the house, weighted with a sense of irreparable loss. Once more, she had to fall back entirely upon her husband for society. But thank goodness ! the years would pass—everything

passed in this world ; otherwise Life would be utterly unendurable. And if she had committed an act of supreme sacrifice, as far as her personal feelings were concerned, she knew it was for Judy's good. If she suffered, the child profited. This consolation sustained her. And as time went on there were compensations. It was a wonderful joy, when Judy came back at midsummer, looking the picture of health and happiness. Margaret had her reward, as she noted how much the girl was improved in every particular, and how ladylike were her habits. Her preceptors forwarded an excellent report of their pupil's conduct during the term, and spoke highly of her abilities. She had a receptive memory, great powers of observation, and much natural intelligence, coupled with a considerable amount of perseverance. Her general behaviour was admirable, and Judy appeared to be a favourite both with teachers and school fellows. Margaret showed this report to Sir Reginald. He took a great deal of interest in his "protegé," and constantly walked over to see her. This pleased Dick—not that he got on with the Baronet personally—but it flattered his pride to think that his daughter should be taken up by one of the richest and most influential men in the county. He even tried to pull himself together a bit during Judy's vacation, and knocked off drink to a certain extent. He took her out riding every day, and altogether devoted great pains to her equine

education. He would cross-examine her as to the various points of a hunter, and when he purchased a new animal asked her to mention its defects. He was surprised to find how frequently her judgments were correct. She had evidently a wonderful eye for a horse, and her criticisms often inspired him with admiration. He foresaw that she would be of the greatest service to him in his profession. Margaret had ridden well in her youth, but of late years her nerve seemed impaired. She had grown particular about the horses she rode, and did not care to hunt an awkward one with rough paces or bad mouth. But his girl did not know the meaning of the word—fear, and in his selfish way, Dick was uncommonly proud of her. Altogether, the holidays passed more happily than Margaret anticipated, and for the greater portion of the time, her husband was on his best behaviour. Once only did he break out in Judy's presence, and then, the child appeared so shocked and dismayed, that she hurried from the room. But she had seen and heard enough to cause her to shrink involuntarily from close contact with her father.

When Christmas came round Judy was in her glory. Her passion for riding had increased and she spent the greater portion of the day on horseback. There was, indeed, no keeping her out of the saddle, and William encouraged her inclinations in this respect. Margaret's only fear was that she might injure her health by

taking too much exercise, but it seemed to agree with the girl, who was fresh as a rosebud. With any number of idle animals in the stable, waiting for the advent of customers, it was difficult to restrict Judy's tastes, and Margaret congratulated herself more than ever on her daughter only succumbing temporarily to the influences of horse and hound. A few weeks' indulgence in her favourite pastime would not leave deteriorating traces behind of any lasting nature.

The first time that little Judy accompanied her parents out hunting, she created a sensation. On jogging from the Meet to draw the nearest covert, the Field were highly diverted by seeing a small child, sitting straight as a dart on the round back of a stout cob, resolutely edging her way to the front. Regardless of danger, she wriggled round the heels of every animal opposing her progress, and never rested, until she gained a position immediately by the hounds. Contented at last, she trotted gaily on, looking daggers at any member of the Hunt, who tried to divest her of her pride of place. She had on a loose covert coat, and her wavy hair was tied back with a blue ribbon. Altogether, she presented a most workmanlike and undeniable appearance. Possibly, it was its extreme determination which attracted attention to the small figure.

The juvenile rider of the cob suffered no attendant groom, no leading string, or any

similar weakness. She knew how to take care of herself.

"Who's that little girl?" asked first one, then the other. "By Jove! she knows how to ride. She's a plucky little beggar and no mistake."

"Don't you know?" came the answer. "That's little Judy Garrard—Dick Garrard's only daughter. Like father, like child. They say she can ride almost any horse in their stable already, which is saying a good deal at that age."

Interest in the child's performances increased, when, later in the day, a good fox was set on foot, who afforded a capital run. To the universal astonishment, Judy was seen to scuttle along and jump with the best of them. The roan cob on which her father had mounted her was a marvellous performer, and with so light a weight on his back, he showed himself capable of achieving prodigies of valour. The rider distinguished herself highly, riding with extraordinary nerve and judgment. That was the wonder. She combined the two. She never jumped an unnecessary fence and never shirked an unavoidable one. The climax was reached, when the Field came to a nasty bottom with deep, treacherous banks guarding the slimy-looking water. The huntsman endeavoured to make his horse walk down into its unsavoury recesses, and scramble up as best he could, but his good grey hunter obstinately refused. He

did not like the look of the place. Neither did the majority of the pursuers, for they made off in hot haste to a ford, some couple of fields distant. But the huntsman persevered in his attempts to cross. Suddenly, he heard a shrill child's voice in his rear exclaim: "Let me come. You have had your turn." Before he could recover from his amazement, he found himself pushed aside by the stout roan cob. Judy took her steed short by the head, drove her tiny heel against his side, and the pair descended with a splash, plump into the midst of the bottom. Although boggy, they managed to crawl out on the opposite side, after a somewhat hazardous struggle. The roan shook his quarters, as if disliking the job, and the child looked back and called out to the baffled huntsman, "Come on. Try him again."

Thus encouraged, Jim Sutton prevailed upon his animal to follow the excellent example set him. He ranged up beside Judy, no longer able to withhold his admiration.

"Well done, little Missy," he called out. "You have given the whole lot of us a lead. I am very much obliged to you."

At this, Judy's face flushed with triumph.

"Forrard on!" she cried in reply. "May I follow you, I say?"

He waved his arm in token of assent, and the unequal pair galloped on, in order to recover lost ground. The hounds had gained several hundred yards by the delay, and were racing

over the wide pastures, with their fox hard pressed, running in full sight. It was an inspiring, invigorating chase, but only about half a dozen people, who succeeded in getting over the bottom were in it. The rest of the Field, —Dick included—made a wrong turn and were hopelessly distanced. But now, the leading division came to a high stake and bound fence, with an awkward blind ditch on the near side. It was an obstacle that wanted some doing—as the phrase goes. Jim Sutton's grey found it more to his mind than the bottom, for he cleared it beautifully in his stride. The huntsman looked back and considering the place much too big for a child, shouted to Judy not to follow. But she disdained the advice. Rousing the roan with all her girlish strength, she set him straight at the fence. As the cob neared it, it seemed almost as high as himself. Nevertheless, like the gallant animal he was, who scorned to turn his brave head from any mortal thing, he collected himself for a supreme effort. He bounded off his hocks, launched himself into the air with a confidence born of a great heart, gave a marvellous twist to his mottled quarters and — got over. It really was splendidly done.

"Bravo," shouted the spectators, astounded by the child's daring and the roan's leaping talents. "Hoick after them, young lady. Forrard, forrard on."

Judy's heart swelled as she listened to the

well-known cry. Forrard on, indeed! She would rather die than lose her place. She was intoxicated with success.

Keen physical enjoyment caused every pulse to throb deliriously—maddeningly. Now, she knew what life meant. It was not represented by lessons, drawing, music, etc. but—hunting. Nothing in the whole world could compare with it. She had tasted of its sweets and caught the fever with a vengeance.

She would have been beheaded rather than soak to the rear at this exquisitely crucial period of the run. The hounds in front were throwing their tongues both merrily and murderously. Joyous, but relentless rang their music. It had not an unflinching note. The little ladies were in deadly earnest. Their bristles stood on end, and one and all meant business. It was a bad look out for the hunted fox. He had shot his bolt, and sought to elude his bloodthirsty pursuers by the adoption of devious tactics. But they were too close upon him. He doubled and dodged through a long, straggling village and might have escaped but for the unkindness of its inhabitants. They turned out in force from their cottages and with hoots, shouts, laughs and screams joined in the chase. Their zeal rendered it an unequal contest and destroyed Pug's slender chances of evasion. They chivied him about from garden to pigstye, from pigstye to henhouse. His limbs were stiff, his tongue hung out hot and red from his parched mouth,

his magnificent brush draggled in the winter mud. But worst of all, his heart beat in quick, flurried strokes, which smothered breathing. Ah ! it was terrible work, this hunting a creature to its death. Would that his pursuers could put themselves in his place and experience—if only for a few minutes—the agony of his sensations. He did not fear death, swift or sudden, but this long, cruel, lingering business, full of suspense—Ha ! what was that ? Old Fairy—the foremost hound in the pack made a snap at his brush. He avoided her gaping jaws, only by falling right into those of her younger sister, Fantasy. Everything black, everything dark, everything confused. . . . Is this Death ? Death, really Death ? Ah ! They rolled him over in an allotment garden, amid stunted cabbage stumps and Brussels' sprouts. Judy turned her head away. She could not bear to witness the obsequies. When at length she looked, she found her father by her side, listening complacently to the congratulations pouring in upon him with reference to his daughter's achievements. So loudly were her praises sounded that the child blushed. Dick was intensely delighted, and could not make enough of Judy. His gratification increased when a stranger addressed him and offered to purchase the roan cob for any sum he liked to name.

“ I wish I could buy your brave little girl as well,” he added, with a touch of quaint humour. “ But I presume she is not for sale ? ”

"Rather, not," answered Dick. "But you may have the cob for a hundred and twenty guineas, if you please. He is as good as they make 'em."

It was a fancy price, but the stranger did not object, and the bargain was concluded there and then. Never again would the good roan carry little Judy. But her attention was diverted in another direction. Jim Sutton now came up to her on foot, bearing the dead fox's brush in his hand. With all ceremony, he begged to be allowed to present it to the gallant little lady, who had ridden so well and so bravely. Then, in the presence of the entire company, he smeared Judy's cheek with blood. She did not like the blood, but she felt as proud as a peacock. There was great difficulty in persuading her to quit the scene of her triumph. She was all for seeing another run, and pleaded hard not to be sent home. Margaret, however, was stern and insisted on obedience. But so impassioned were the child's appeals, that she only gained her way by promising to accompany Judy.

"You must not get too conceited, my dear," she remonstrated, half in jest, half in earnest, "and you must always remember that hunting is not everything in life. Look upon it as an amusement, but not as an imperative business."

"I *have* enjoyed myself so, Mummy," said Judy excitedly. "I call this a red letter day. I can't help loving hunting. Is it wrong?"

"No, my darling, not wrong, so long as you

do not let it dominate you, and become a slave to a mere physical amusement. But you will understand this better, as you get older. Meanwhile, enjoy your dear little self, whilst you can. Don't think I am not proud of you, child, for I am—very."

CHAPTER XII

A FIRST PROPOSAL

THE years passed and Judy was seventeen. When the spring came round, it was arranged that she should leave Highburgh House. Her mother's health was far from good, and no longer proved equal to the many demands made upon it. Judy had spent a remarkable happy time at school, and did not look forward to her life at home in a variety of respects. As she grew older, she became more alive to her father's shortcomings, and they inspired her with increasing shame and repugnance. She had developed into a highly-educated and refined young lady. Any symptom of vulgarity—the smallest lapse of good manners jarred on her susceptibilities. She soon discovered, that it was impossible to be long in the society of Dick Garrard, without hot blushes rising to her cheeks. She spoke French and German with tolerable fluency, played well on the piano, and possessed a nice soprano voice, which had been

carefully cultivated. Passionately fond as she still was of hunting and everything connected therewith, she foresaw that on her return to the parental roof, it would be difficult for her to rise superior to the status of a common rough rider. She loved her mother as fondly as ever, but mingled with her love, there entered a strong element of pity and wonder. She often asked herself how so charming and lady-like a woman could have made such a terrible 'mésalliance.' It was a mystery which Judy failed to fathom.

The Christmas holidays were spent much as usual, and, thanks to an open season, the girl got a great deal of hunting, which she thoroughly enjoyed. One memorable day, the hounds met on the far side of the country, a long way from Fernleigh. It so happened, however, that Dick had promised to meet a customer, and show him a black thoroughbred horse he had for sale. It was a fine young animal, with a good turn of speed, and Dick thought fast enough to win a steeplechase. The customer entertained a fancy for racing and was specially desirous of purchasing a nag capable of winning the Ladies' Cup at the annual county cross country fixture. But when the morning came, Dick was tormented with toothache, which had prevented him from sleeping all night. He protested that he could not possibly keep his appointment in person. Instead, he announced his intention of visiting the nearest dentist and having the

offending masticator removed as quickly as possible. Margaret was also ailing, and not in a fit condition to ride over a dozen miles to covert, with the prospect of even a longer distance home. Judy came to her parents' rescue, and at once offered her services.

"I can quite well ride Raven," she said to her father. "He is a sour tempered brute and not the cleanest of fencers, still, I know his peculiarities, and am certain I could give Captain Ricardo a very fair show."

"Trust you for that, my girl," responded Dick. "There ain't many as could give a better, though I says it as shouldn't. What do you say, Margaret?"

"I don't quite like Judy going such a distance by herself," replied his wife. "You know how girls get talked about in the hunting field, if they are not properly chaperoned, and now-a-days men are very free in their manners."

"Fiddledee!" he scornfully rejoined. "Men are just what they always were and always will be. Sensible girls learn how to take care of themselves."

Judy listened attentively to the argument. She was prudent enough not to desire giving any occasion for gossip. Her mother was right in her opinion.

"Why not let William come with me?" she suggested. "He could be spared from the yard for a few hours. I would show Raven to Captain Ricardo in the early part of the day.

If he liked the horse and wanted to buy him, William would then be at hand to ride Raven home. With a second hunter out, I can easily make my own way back. It would be a pity to disappoint Captain Ricardo."

Both parents acquiesced, so it was decided that William should accompany his young mistress on a five-year-old chestnut mare, remarkable rather for her stoutness and staying powers than for leaping qualifications. As a matter of fact, she was but a moderate performer, and required a good deal more schooling to finish her education across country.

"Do promise me to be careful, Judy," pleaded Margaret. "Don't ride the mare at anything very enormous. I shall be most anxious till you come back."

Judy kissed her mother affectionally on the cheek. "All right," she said cheerily. "I will not do anything rash. And now, I must start at once, or else I shall arrive late at the Meet." So saying, she ran round to the yard, and a few minutes later, Margaret watched her go forth, accompanied by the faithful William, who looked supremely happy.

"I do hope no harm will befall the child," mused Margaret. "She really is too young and pretty to go about by herself. Luckily, Judy is not at all a flirty kind of girl, and has a great deal more sense than I had at her age." And she heaved a sigh. Her husband was swearing and cursing over his toothache, and no

one had any peace until he drove from the house, intent on getting the tooth extracted. Order was then restored, and she went about her customary avocations.

Meanwhile, Judy trotted out to the Meet at a steady pace. All the first part of the way, she and William kept up a lively conversation, the subject of their remarks being exclusively devoted to horseflesh. Presently, however, they were joined by a good-looking young yeoman, whereupon William respectfully retired to the rear, in spite of Judy's remonstrances. John Dormer—for so he was named—was a great admirer of the girl. He took every opportunity of seeking her society, and various members of the Hunt displayed a keen interest in his courtship. He was a tall, muscular, well-set-up young fellow, with a certain amount of capital and a nice old homestead of his own. Several of the ladies averred that he would be a very suitable match for Judy Garrard, and she could not well expect in her position to do better for herself. But this was an opinion with which the principal party concerned did not at all coincide. Long ago, in her own mind, Judy decided she would never marry anybody but a gentleman born and bred. John Dormer spoke with a broad Midlandshire dialect. He was comparatively uneducated, and could converse intelligently on few subjects more intellectual than horses and stock. She respected him for a certain sturdy honesty and upright-

ness, but as an admirer she never gave him a particle of encouragement, and was rather annoyed than otherwise by his pertinacity. She therefore greeted him civilly, but without effusion. Already, Judy Garrard had become a well-known member of the Hunt, and was on friendly terms with most of its members. She was a favourite with the Field, and the married men were peculiarly kind to her. They admired her fresh, young beauty and fearless horsemanship. The bachelors on the whole were less demonstrative in their attentions, but then, it was not easy for them to venture so far without incriminating themselves. And in these days of female pursuit, it is incumbent upon them to be very careful ; poor, persecuted dears ! Fortunately for Judy, she cared more about her hunting than for all the men put together. She had no fancy for any individual one, but was civil to all alike. At the same time she brooked no familiarities. This fact was fast becoming recognized to the mortification of some, the admiration of others. She would not permit herself to be patronized, neither had she the slightest wish to presume. In short, she behaved like a perfect little lady, whether her parents were present or absent. John Dormer was overjoyed at finding the girl unaccompanied by her father or mother. He really was desperately in love, and the sight of Judy's slim figure encased in its well-fitting habit, only added fuel to the flame. He noted the graceful

set of her small head, and brillancy of her eyes and complexion, and the sunny ripples of her abundant hair. He could not help looking at her. His gaze expressed his admiration, for he was no adept in the art of deception. If opportunity had but befriended him, he would have blurted out his sentiments long ere this. For days past he had lived in a kind of fever heat, longing for the climax to arrive and make him either, supremely happy or unutterably miserable. The suspense was killing him. He cleared his throat, and manlike, opened the conversation by making a few original observations about the weather. That was a safe topic, which Judy had no objection to discussing. She stuck to the climatic conditions as long as she could, but they failed after a few minutes. Then a silence occurred, and our friend John cleared his throat again even more vigorously than before.

"Do you know that I am refurnishing my house, Miss Judy?" he started off in desperation. And his eyes sought hers.

"No," she answered coolly. "I was not aware of the fact."

"I do so wish you would tell me if you would rather have a red or a blue carpet in the drawing-room."

"Really, Mr. Dormer, it makes no difference to me. It is a matter entirely for your own taste to decide."

"Oh! please don't say that, Miss Judy.

Men are such helpless creatures when they live all alone. I had hoped—I did look forward."

"Well!" she said judicially, "Since you wish for my advice, I think I should choose a red carpet. If I am not mistaken, your drawing-room gets all the morning sun, and the blue would be more likely to fade."

"There!" he exclaimed. "What a splendid housekeeper you would make. I feel awful lonely, Miss Judy, I do indeed. I don't believe God ever meant man to live alone. The fact is I'm regular lost without a wife."

"Can't you get one?" she asked, a spirit of mischief taking possession of her.

"Perhaps I could," he answered enigmatically. "But I'm not sure if the right girl will have me. That's the difficulty."

Judy suddenly coloured a bright crimson as she met his gaze. His meaning dawned upon her like a flash of lightning. Giving Raven a stroke with the butt end of her hunting crop, she sought to ride away from her admirer. But he had gone too far to be denied. "Stop a moment, Miss Judy," he called out in a hoarse voice. "I must have an answer one way or the other, or I shall go mad. If you knew how I have thought and dreamed of this moment. Perhaps I ought to have waited and not rushed you like this, but I couldn't. Upon my soul I couldn't, and that's the truth. I do so want you to be my wife. Will you say yes? Oh! do

please, *please* say yes." And he stopped short, his breath coming in thick, flurried gasps.

He was terribly in earnest, and she pitied him from the bottom of her heart. Any girlish sense of personal triumph was completely merged in compassion.

"Hush, hush!" she exclaimed. "Pray do not say any more. It only hurts us both."

"Of course, I know I am not half good enough for you," he continued humbly. "I don't know the man that is, if it comes to that, but if real love and admiration and all that sort of thing count—"

"No, no," she interrupted in agitated accents. "Believe me, when I say that I am not thinking of getting married. I would not leave my mother on any consideration. My parents want me at home to help them with their business. Oh! Mr. Dorner, can't you understand? Do try to do so."

He hung his head and sighed as if his heart were breaking. Again there was a pause, which neither seemed capable of ending. At last, he looked despairingly at her and said, in a husky voice, "Is there no hope, Miss Judy?"

"I should be wrong to deceive you," she replied, a mist blurring her eyes. "It is both better and kinder that you should know the truth. I hope I have not given you a great deal of pain, and that you will soon get over it and like somebody else more suited to you than myself."

"That is impossible," he returned. "I shall live and die a bachelor."

"Why! I declare," she ejaculated, with unutterable relief. "Here we are at the Meet. How time has fled to be sure! I had no idea we were so near."

"I have more than half a mind to turn tail and go home," he said dejectedly.

"Nonsense! I beg of you as a favour to do nothing half so foolish. A good run with hounds will prove the best tonic for your mental condition." As she spoke, she caught sight of Captain Ricardo pulling up his horse's girths, and effected her escape. She felt very uncomfortable about John Dormer, and was glad to cut the interview short. Some girls might have been delighted at receiving their first proposal, but Judy experienced no pleasurable sensations. She did not enjoy the spectacle of seeing an honest man suffer, even although she regarded him as her inferior in point of education. That was but an accident, for which he was not to blame. She felt grateful for his love, and regretted being unable to return the affection she had seemingly inspired. The incident rendered her a little sad—a trifle thoughtful for the remainder of the day.

"Good morning, Miss Garrard," said Captain Ricardo, politely raising his hat as Judy approached. "Is your father out to-day?"

"No," she answered, "He had such a bad

toothache, he has gone to the dentist to have the tooth extracted, and sent me in his place."

"Hm! Is that the horse you are mounted upon?"

"Yes," said Judy. "He is clean thoroughbred. His sire is Kingfisher, and the dam, Merry Lass. He has an excellent turn of speed. Would you like to get on him at once, Captain Ricardo, or would you rather see him perform first with hounds? My father wishes you to have every trial."

"Thanks. If you don't mind, I would prefer your giving me a bit of a show to commence with. I presume the animal is a good fencer, Eh?"

"I believe so, although I have only hunted him a couple of times, and we did not do much on either occasion. But he takes his fences in regular steeplechase form and gallops over them in his stride, as if they were nothing."

"That's the sort," said Captain Ricardo approvingly. "I hate your sticky ones."

He was a small, fair man, possessed of a great ambition to win renown between the flags. He was a nice weight, but not very strong on a horse.

He looked Raven carefully over, felt his sinews, examined his hocks and opened his mouth. The age was right. Apparently, he approved of the black, although he did not openly say so, but Judy could tell from his manner, that Raven took his fancy. The horse had one great recommendation. He was

absolutely sound, and stood on the best of legs and feet. There was no need to spare him on that score, and Judy determined to send him along directly the opportunity presented itself. If she could go home and tell her father the horse was sold through her instrumentality, it would please him.

CHAPTER XIII

THE STRANGER IN THE PEPPER AND SALT COAT.

BEFORE long, the hounds moved off to draw a spinney about a mile distant from the Meet. It was only a small patch of gorse on the side of a hill, but by great good luck, it held a fox. Pug made off at a fair pace, but declined to go far from his native haunts. However in spite of a twisty course, he afforded the Field an excellant chance of indulging in plenty of jumping.

It was a beautiful grass country, the obstacles were not too big, and the people greatly enjoyed themselves. Judy steered clear of the crowd, and Captain Ricardo followed in her wake. Raven entertained a rooted aversion to being hustled, and if interfered with at a fence was prone to show temper and refuse. The girl wisely did not give him a chance of misbehaving. The great thing was not to upset an animal possessing so irritable a temperament. This she knew full well. It so happened, that

there was no wire on this side of the country, and the hedges were mostly unadorned by stiff top binders. In short, they were exactly suited to a thoroughbred's style of jumping. Raven's fault consisted in not rising quite high enough. On the other hand, he covered a tremendous distance of ground, and there was never any fear of his dropping his hind legs in a ditch on the far side. He sometimes showed certain misgivings respecting a deep cut one towards him. Judy rode him with great skill and firmness, and Raven happened to be in an unusually good humour. Her light hands suited him. He did not make a single mistake, but swished through the tops of the twigs in fine style, landing lightly and going away again without a moment's delay. So well satisfied was the Captain, that, at the first check, he expressed a desire to try him. Judy signalled to William, and her saddle was quickly transferred to the chestnut mare, whilst her attendant bestrode Captain Ricardo's hunter. The fox meandered leisurely about for another twenty minutes before seeking refuge in a handy drain. Captain Ricardo expressed himself delighted with Raven's long, swinging stride, and whilst spades and terriers were in requisition, he came up to Judy and said he was prepared to make a bid of two hundred and twenty guineas. Dick had been asking an additional thirty pounds, but Judy knew that her father generally took considerably less than the sum demanded. It was

agreed that Raven should return to his stable, and if the offer were accepted, the horse would be sent over in a couple of day's time, subject, of course, to a veterinary examination.

Having arranged the matter satisfactorily, Judy felt more at leisure to enjoy herself. Business was apt to interfere with legitimate hunting, but she resolved to extract all possible pleasure from the afternoon's proceedings. Meanwhile, she took a comprehensive look round the Field, and espied sundry friends and acquaintances. Presently, her eye rested on the unknown figure of a total stranger. He was attired in an admirably cut pepper and salt coat, his nether limbs were encased in white cords. He stood over six feet high, and there was something about him which attracted the girl. He had a sunburnt face and a pair of nice, honest, brown eyes, which looked straightly out from beneath their brows. His close-cropped hair and well-trimmed moustache had a military air. Judy decided in her own mind that he was certainly a gentleman, and probably an officer. The animal he bestrode scarcely seemed worthy of the rider. Evidently a hireling, it showed unmistakable signs of hard usage, coupled with inferior food and grooming. It was a bright bay, with a Roman nose, and a white blaze down its face. No doubt, it had seen better days, for despite its poorness, it was a well-shaped animal and had a varmint look about it. Suddenly, Judy be-

came aware of the fact, that the stranger returned her gaze with interest. She withdrew her eyes hurriedly, and turning to Captain Ricardo, said with an assumption of indifference, "Who is that over there?"

"I have not the least idea," he replied, somewhat contemptuously. "But I should say he is one of those Tugby fellows. Fancy a man wearing cords instead of leathers! That stamps him to my mind."

Judy could not help instituting a comparison between the speaker's diminutive but admirably clad limbs, and stalwart ones of the unknown. She infinitely preferred the latter, despite their despised cords. She was now left to her own resources, William having taken Raven home. The chestnut mare stood placidly, with her head hung down and her eyes blinking lazily. She did not seem to take the slightest interest in the proceedings. She scarcely cocked an ear when the fox bolted and a tremendous rush ensued to follow in his wake. Judy had to apply the spur to rouse Joanna. But before the indolent creature had time to warm her sluggish blood, the hounds ran into poor Pug and bowled him over. Another wait, and the forenoon had flown. After a consultation between huntsman and master, it was arranged to try a covert, lying on the very outskirts of the country. This entailed a three miles jog in a direction all away from Fernleigh. It was an uncertain find, but Fortone once more befriended the

Field. A fox was set on foot of very different calibre from the one who had already paid the penalty of his want of enterprise. He proved to be a stout, roving, adventurous fellow, who set his mask straight for distant lands. Again, Judy rode wide of the crowd. She was by no means certain of her mount, and did not wish to parade the chestnut's shortcomings more than possible. After a few minutes had elapsed, she espied the gentleman with the pepper and salt coat, riding a line of his own, well to the right of hounds. She determined to select him as her pilot. At first, he was unconscious of her decision, and galloped hard at everything he came across. Luckily, the obstacles encountered were more trappy than formidable, and the bay was as clever as a cat. He knew every trick of the game, but Joanna blundered once or twice. She required practice and took off very uncertainly, having no idea of putting in a little step. Judy greatly admired her leader's courage and the unhesitating manner in which he selected the most practicable place in the fence and made for it. He was evidently a horseman of no mean order, and possessed a good eye to country. He got the old bay along quite wonderfully. They had been galloping at best pace for about twenty minutes, when they came to a flight of stiff rails. There was no shirking them. They had to be taken. He of the pepper and salt garment never faltered. He drove his old crock gallantly at

them, but the ground in their immediate vicinity was greasy and trodden by cattle. The animal slipped badly and struck the top bar hard with both fore legs. The timber yielded so unreadily that both man and horse executed a complete somersault, and fell to the left. It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good.

Mounted as she was, Judy did not altogether relish the rails, but when their top bar went, she popped the chestnut over the remaining palings. By this time, the stranger had risen to his feet, only to find his steed half way across the field. Judy pulled up on landing and called out in concern.

"Not hurt, I hope? It looked a nasty toss."

"Thanks," he responded. "I'm as right as ninepence, but it strikes me, I shall have a deuce of a job to get my nag. He has taken to his heels with a vengeance."

"I'll go and fetch him," she said good naturedly.

"Oh, please don't mind me. You will lose your place in the run."

But already she was out of earshot. Applying spur to the chestnut mare, Judy prevailed upon her to gallop for once in her life, and in five minutes she returned triumphant, with the bay trotting docilely alongside.

"I've caught him," she panted. "But he took some catching."

"A thousand thanks," responded the stranger gratefully. "You are really too good."

The delay, however, left them both a long way in the rear of hounds. Moreover, the bay had over-reached his near fore, and cut a piece from his heel, the size of a shilling. The rider eyed the damage rather ruefully.

"Poor old beast," he exclaimed. "I suppose I ought to take him straight back to his stables. Eh! What do you say?"

"You can keep him going as long as he is warm," she answered reassuringly.

"It is only a surface cut of no great importance.

"You are right," he said, after examining the wound. Then, turning to the girl with an air of apology, he added. "I am so grieved at spoiling your run."

"Please do not trouble about that," she responded magnanimously. "To tell the truth, I am only riding a young animal that does not know its business."

"You ought not to ride such an one," he rejoined.

She laughed merrily. "I am obliged to, and many of them, what's more."

He looked as if he would like to ask some question, but was too much of a gentleman to display any undue curiosity. He contented himself with climbing nimbly into the saddle, and the pair started in vain pursuit of the vanished pack. They had quite a nice little steeplechase all to themselves, but did not succeed in catching hounds. They rode their hardest, but

success failed to reward their efforts. The Chase had disappeared as if by magic. Neither of them knew where they were, the fox having run in a bee line away from home. Before long, the bay began to hold out signals of distress. The stranger thereupon pulled up and consulted his watch.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, "It is half past three o'clock. How times flies to be sure; I have to make my way back to Tugby, and have not the faintest notion how far it is from here. Can you enlighten my ignorance by any chance?"

"I am afraid I can't," said Judy. "All I know is that we have run right out of our own country and are in a strange one."

"If we pop over this little fence just in front, it will land us on to a road," he remarked. "We shall then meet somebody to give us information." So saying, he set the bay at a low hedge right ahead.

The animal landed with a tremendous flounder and narrowly escaped a second fall. "Come as hard as you can at it," shouted out the rider to Judy. "There is an extra wide ditch on the landing side."

She shook the mare up as well as she could but Joanna made only a feeble response. The consequence was she jumped short, and catching her toes on the brink of the ditch, pitched with considerable violence into the road. Judy was thrown on to the crown of her head. Quick

as thought, the stranger vaulted to the ground, and ran to where the girl lay prostrate. One good turn deserves another. To his consternation, he found that she was unconscious, and made no answer when spoken to. Here was a nice dilemma!

"And I wanted to catch the five o'clock train to Town," he muttered, "but she is a real little brick and I cannot possibly leave her."

So he lifted Judy's pretty head very gently and rested it on his knee. Then he fumbled in his pocket and produced a flask of whiskey. He forced some of its contents between her lips. A wandering curl had escaped from its restraining net and stirred gently on her forehead. He smoothed it back with the tenderness of a woman. A curious inclination seized him to press his lips to the fresh, young ones at his mercy. But he suppressed it almost as quickly as it arose within him. The temptation was one no gentleman should yield to. But the child was wonderfully attractive in her helplessness and unconsciousness.

"I wonder who and what she is," he mused. "One thing is certain. She is much too young and pretty to come out hunting all by herself. Her parents, whoever they may be, ought to take more care of the poor, dear, little girl."

After an interval of a five minutes, Judy sighed and opened her eyes in a questioning manner. She encountered the compassionate orbs of her companion, gazing at her with an

expression of intense concern. At first, she returned his glance vaguely and vacantly, but as her senses gradually returned, a warm crimson mantled in either cheek. She raised her head and said wonderingly—"What has happened? Why am I lying here?"

"You have had a bad fall," he answered. "I fear you are a good deal hurt."

She pulled herself together by an effort of will, and replied. "No, I am all right. I assure you I am all right. Let us be going on." So saying, she tried to rise to her feet, but felt strangely dizzy. Indeed, she would have fallen to the ground again had he not supported her with his arm.

"How idiotic of me!" she exclaimed in accents of mingled impatience and annoyance. "It is really too ridiculous that I cannot stand by myself."

"I wonder if there is an Inn anywhere near?" he observed.

Unperceived, a labouring man had approached and overheard the query.

"Yes," he interposed. "There is the 'Cat and the Fiddle' within a hundred yards."

"Thank goodness!" ejaculated the stranger. "If we could get the young lady to lie down on the sofa for a few minutes she may recover. Here," speaking to the man, "take my horse and show us the way. I will look after the lady's."

The labourer led the bay away, and the

stranger took Judy in his arms as if she were a mere child, and deposited her in the saddle before she had time to realize his intention. Supporting her with one hand, he held the mare's bridle in the other. It was a novel sensation to the girl to be thus cared for. She contrasted her companion's kindly and considerate manner with her father's rough and ready ways. She was not too shaken by her fall to be incapable of making mental notes distinctly favourable to the stranger. He soon got her inside the Inn, where he insisted on her lying full length on an old horsehair sofa. He covered her feet carefully with a woollen antimacassar, and placed a cushion behind her head. She was totally unused to such attentions, and felt half grateful half embarrassed. Anyhow, it was very nice being waited upon by such a fine, tall, soldier-like gentleman. He ordered tea, and when the landlady brought it in, they drank it with relish and partook of a large plateful of bread and butter and jam. It was a very simple meal, but a most enjoyable one, and by the time it was finished, Judy felt almost herself again. The dizziness in her head had vanished, and beyond feeling rather stiff, she declared she was none the worse for her spill. Her eyes were bright, and the colour had returned to her cheeks. She expressed her determination of riding home. He demurred.

“How far is it from here to Tugby,” he inquired of the landlady.

She professed complete ignorance, and retired to ask her husband. That gentleman stated the distance to be not a yard less than ten miles.

"In that case, I have a nice little journey before me of twenty two miles," said Judy. "I must start at once. As it is, we shall be beset by darkness."

"But are you sure you can ride?" he inquired with solicitude. "I daresay I might succeed in hiring some kind of covered trap to take you home."

"I would not hear of such a thing. I am ever so much better. I am indeed."

He looked at her uncertainly. During the first moments after her fall, he had feared she was suffering from concussion of the brain; of which he entertained a holy dread, but to his relief, the attendant symptoms were now completely absent. Suddenly, a bright thought struck him.

"Why not ride together as far as Tugby?" he said. "It will then be quite dark, and no doubt you can train to wherever you want to go."

CHAPTER XIV

“WILL YOU TELL ME YOUR NAME?”

“I THINK I shall *have* to ride back,” Judy answered after a moment’s reflection.

“Why?” he demanded. “You will be tired to death.”

“All the same,” she persisted. “I think I had better ride.”

He wondered at her apparent obstinacy and said, “You shan’t do any such thing, that is—if I have the least say in the matter.”

She did not at all resent his tone of authority. On the contrary, she laughed merrily and confessed the truth.

“When I left home this morning, Father only gave me a shilling to pay for a shoe, in case I should happen to lose one. I am afraid my funds will not permit therefore of a railway ticket.

“There!” she concluded, with a sudden blush. “Now you know all about the matter.”

When he heard this statement, he marvelled still more. Fancy sending a child like that out

hunting on a half broken animal, with no one to look after her, and with only a shilling in her pocket in the event of any accident befalling her! His blood grew hot at the very idea. With a strong effort he suppressed his desire to ask questions concerning her parents, and contented himself with remarking. "Well! well! we need not discuss ways and means until we reach Tugby. If my prophecy prove correct, it will be pitch dark by the time we get there. These winter afternoons are so very short. I expect my poor old charger will pull out of the stable dead lame."

So saying, he inquired for the bill, and when Judy offered to defray her share of it, smiled with indulgent scorn.

"You improvident young lady!" he exclaimed jestingly. "Do you propose to leave yourself without a farthing for future contingencies?"

At this badinage, she coloured up to the roots of her hair. She was very proud and hated being paid for by men. She made a point of accepting nothing at their hands if she could possibly help it; but somehow, the stranger did not appear to belong to the same category as the majority of her hunting acquaintances. In a courteous, perfectly gentlemanly, but firm manner, he compelled her to yield to his will. She felt she had met her master. Consequently, she suffered him to pay for the tea under protest. Having settled this little diffi-

culty, they remounted their tired animals, and soon were once more jogging amicably side by side. At seventeen, one quickly recovers from the effects of a fall, and save for a pretty considerable headache, Judy vowed she was none the worse for her disastrous tumble into the road. The mare had luckily escaped scot free, but having cooled down, the bay was extremely lame, and they were forced to adapt the pace to his infirmities. The riders conversed uninterruptedly on a variety of subjects, chiefly connected with sport, and the way did not seem as long as might have been expected. Nevertheless, when they reached Tugby, darkness enveloped the landscape on all sides. To make matters worse, a cold, drizzling rain began to descend, accompanied by a chilly fog. The evening promised to be distinctly unpleasant, especially as a north-east wind arose and blew with increasing force. Without saying a word as to his intentions, the stranger made straight for the railway station. Finding there was a train on to Fernleigh Junction, he took a couple of first-class tickets and ordered a horse box for Joanna. He did not condescend to consult Judy and deposited her safely in front of the fire burning in the ladies' waiting room. He paid a man to lead the bay back to his stable in Tugby, and another to look after the mare. When his arrangements were complete, he fetched his companion. By this time the train was drawn up in readiness on the platform. He hustled

Judy into it before she was sufficiently recovered from her surprise to protest, and to her unutterable astonishment, just as the locomotive was about to move off, in he jumped, sat down by her side, and banged the door to.

"What are you doing?" she queried in a complete state of mystification.

"Nothing," he responded, with a reassuring smile. "I don't like your travelling alone after dark, so I propose to see you to a place of safety. Have you any objections to offer, Mademoiselle?"

He looked so pleasant, yet withal so masterful, that Judy thought it was useless her naming them. And she felt much touched too by his kindly consideration. It was rather a nice sensation being looked after by a good-looking man.

"You have put yourself out on purpose for me," she said gratefully.

But he would not admit this, true as was Judy's assertion.

"On the contrary," he returned brightly. "I have done absolutely nothing but consult my own pleasure and convenience. Men are not given to making martyrs of themselves I can assure you."

She did not know whether he were in jest or in earnest, and made no immediate reply. It really was much pleasanter whirling along in a fast, well-lit train with an agreeable companion, instead of wearily plodding home on a tired

horse in the dark and the rain. She fully realized this fact. She pretended to shut her eyes, but every now and then she took a peep at her companion from behind her long lashes. And each time that she did so, she met his glance, and he nodded in a friendly fashion as much as to say, "All right, my dear little girl. You need not be afraid of me."

Anyway, she felt quite safe with him, and yet his gaze made her blood thrill in quite a curious and novel fashion. She attributed it to personal magnetism, and perhaps she was not far wrong. Judy and he of the pepper-and-salt coat got on very well together, and took pleasure in one another's society, short though their acquaintanceship had been.

Arrived at their destination, he stepped briskly out on to the platform and helped her down from the carriage. She tripped on her habit skirt and would have fallen, but for the strong hand which supported her. Never had she felt so stupid, so confused, or more annoyed at what she deemed her awkwardness. The moment of parting had come, and she experienced a strange reluctance to wish her cavalier good-by. Was he hunting with their hounds? When would he be out next? Would they meet again? She longed to put these questions, but naturally did not wish to exhibit curiosity on the subject. Woman-like, she sought to arrive at the goal in a round-about manner.

"Will you give me your address, so that I may send money for my ticket by post?" she said turning her eyes away. "It makes me miserable to owe anybody anything, and I shall get an order the first thing to-morrow."

He laughed and shook his head, with a rather forced attempt at cheeriness.

"I am afraid I shall be out of dear old England by to-morrow and on the ocean. As a matter of fact, I wished my nearest living relative in these parts good-bye only yesterday morning. So you see I cannot give you any address."

"You are going away?" she exclaimed, with a sudden sense of disappointment.

"Yes, far away to join my regiment in the North West provinces of India. This has been my last day's hunting for an indefinite period."

"Oh! And when are you coming back?"

"God only knows. Perhaps, next year; perhaps, not for a great many. It all depends on circumstances." And he heaved a sigh.

"In that case," said Judy, taking a sudden decision, "I insist on your having my shilling." So saying, she dropped the coin into his breast pocket.

He drew it out immediately, with the intention of returning it.

"Nothing will induce me to accept it," he said, with a certain amount of heat.

"You must. I insist. Why should you pay for me—a mere stranger?"

All of a sudden, he caught sight of a hole drilled through the shilling.

"It is a lucky one," he exclaimed. "May I change my mind after all, and keep it in remembrance of the kind and generous little giver?" And he looked intently at the girl; so intently indeed, that she could feel herself crimsoning.

"Most certainly," she replied hastily, her voice ringing bravely and truly.

"I trust we may meet again in the hunting field at some future date," he said significantly. "I shall like to think of my plucky little companion when I am in distant lands. I do not want to be impertinent, but before we wish each other good-bye, will you not tell me your name?"

She was about to comply with his request, when a porter came bustling up and interrupted further conversation.

"This way, sir," he said. "You will lose your connection, if you do not hurry up. The stranger took Judy's hand in his, held it for one moment, and disappeared. She stood under the glimmering gas light and watched him go down the underground tunnel which led to the opposite platform. Then she sighed in her turn.

Joanna was already out of her box. Judy went up to her, and taking the mare by the bridle led her home. It was hardly worth while mounting, since her father's house was

only a few hundred yards from the station. The night was cold, dark, wet. As she trudged by the side of Joanna, her thoughts dwelt on her recent companion. Who was he? she wondered. She would give all she possessed to find out. How kind he had been to her, and how manly and good-looking he was! The idea of comparing him with John Dormer—and she smiled faintly. She was more determined than ever, never to marry any one who was not a gentleman in every sense of the word. Whatever little chance poor John might have possessed was gone. The fascinating stranger had completely conquered the girl. For the first time in her life, she felt attracted by one of the opposite sex. He stirred the secret recesses of her nature.

Meanwhile, Margaret was in a distracted condition at her daughter's non-arrival. She sent for William and cross-questioned him as to Judy's movements. He could tell nothing, save that he had come home directly his young mistress changed horses, and she was then quite well and safe. When at length Judy appeared, her mother uttered an exclamation of profound relief.

"What *has* happened to you, my dear child?" she inquired. "I have been in a terrible state of anxiety for the last three hours. It is now past seven o'clock. Come in out of the rain and tell us all your adventures." So saying she led Judy into the parlour, where

Dick was sitting in an armchair smoking a pipe before the fire, with a tumbler of whiskey and water at his elbow.

"Hulloa," he growled. "So you've got back at last! You are a nice sort of person to send out with a young horse. What has kept you so infernally late?"

In course of conversation, the girl was reluctantly forced to disclose that she had had rather a nasty fall, and been compelled by a variety of circumstances to return by train, accompanied by a kind stranger, who refused to part with her until he saw her off at Fernleigh Junction.

"Humph," snorted Dick. "Why on earth were you such an idiot as to jump the mare over anything big, when you knew quite well she was no great performer?"

"But the place was not big, father, I assure you. From the taking off side, it looked a mere nothing. I did try to be careful, but accidents will happen in spite of any amount of caution, as you ought to know."

"Is the mare any the worse?" he demanded, caring more about the animal than the human being related to him.

"Not in the least," she answered brightly. "I would far rather get knocked about a bit myself, than bring a lame animal back to your stable."

Dick seemed to feel the implied reproof, for he changed the subject.

"And who picked you up?" he asked, with a certain show of interest.

"Oh! a man," she responded vaguely. "As a matter of fact, he was the same one who came back with me in the train. He was going on to town this evening."

"And who was he? Don't you know his name?"

"No, he did not tell it to me. But I gathered that he was a stranger, who had hired a hireling from Rickards of Tugby."

"Oh!" exclaimed Dick contemptuously. "He was one of that crew, was he? They don't amount to much, as a rule, and are generally bounders of the deepest dye."

The observation angered Judy, but she kept cool, and observed in an exaggeratedly tranquil voice, "I do not think he came under the category of 'bounder.' Anyway, he was an officer in the army. I know that much, and nothing could have exceeded his kindness as far as I was concerned."

Margaret looked sharply at her daughter. The girl bore her mother's gaze with apparent unconcern. The pair had few secrets between them, but somehow or other Judy did not feel inclined to confess the impression produced upon her by her late companion. She preferred to keep her own counsel. And he was going away, and the probabilities were she might never see him again, so what was the use of talking? She, therefore, turned to her father

and said cheerily, "Raven is sold, and well sold, subject to a veterinary examination. Captain Ricardo took a tremendous fancy to him."

Dick blew a cloud of smoke from his mouth. "You have not done so badly then after all? What figure did you get for the brute?"

"Two hundred and twenty guineas," returned Judy. "Captain Ricardo would not give more, so I thought it better to close with the offer."

"You did rightly," said Dick. "The horse is not everybody's fancy. One mercy is, Judy, your head is screwed on the right way."

This was high praise coming from the quarter whence it did, and the girl felt decidedly relieved. She was rather young to have so much responsibility placed upon her shoulders. It pleased her, however, to find that her father considered she had acted prudently in the matter. Having rendered an account to head quarters, she was graciously permitted to retire to her room. Her mother accompanied her and helped her to get out of her damp clothes.

"Are you sure you are not really hurt, my darling?" asked Margaret anxiously, as soon as they were alone together. "You look rather pale and shaken."

"I believe I fell on my head and was unconscious for a few minutes," said Judy. "But beyond feeling a bit stiff, I am very little the worse. My kind stranger picked me up and

insisted on taking me to an Inn, making me lie down, and giving me tea. Wasn't it nice of him, mother?"

"Very, I wish I knew who he was, so that I could write and thank him."

"How delightful this fire is!" exclaimed Judy. "It is indeed a luxury after a long day's hunting." And putting on her dressing gown, she sank into a wicker armchair for the purpose of toasting her cold little feet.

"When I saw the rain come on, I lit it myself," said Margaret, in a gratified tone. "I knew you would be sure to feel chilly."

"Dear, thoughtful mother!" exclaimed Judy. "I often wonder what this house would be like without you. It would be almost unbearable."

Margaret sat down opposite her daughter. After hunting, it was their invariable custom to retire to Judy's room and talk over the events of the day. They were free here. Dick seldom disturbed them by his presence, and these "*tête a tête*" were among the principal pleasures of Margaret's colourless life. She treasured them as a miser treasures his gold.

"I've got something very exciting to tell you, mother," said the girl presently, kicking one small slippered toe against the other.

Margaret sat up. "Indeed! my dear child. What is it?" she asked with interest,

"I have had a proposal," said Judy in dignified accents.

CHAPTER XV

THE PENALTY OF HUNTING

MARGARET turned first hot, then cold at the possible prospect of losing her beloved child at an early date. Judy's statement set in motion a current of disturbing thoughts.

"Did you—did you accept—it?" she asked in a tremulous voice.

"Oh! dear no," said Judy, staring dreamily into the fire. "I could not."

"Thank goodness!" ejaculated her mother.

"The girls at school used to talk about proposals as if they were very grand things," continued Judy sedately, "but somehow or other, I did not enjoy being made love to one bit. On the contrary, I felt quite uncomfortable for the remainder of the day. It is horrid giving pain to people one respects, mother. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, my dear, I do indeed. But you have not yet told me the name of your admirer, and I am all curiosity."

The girl blushed vividly. "Do you remember John Dormer?"

"Nonsense! Do you mean to say he had the impertinence to propose to you?"

"I am certain that the poor young man had no intention of being impertinent, mother. He was far too much in earnest. In some respects, too, he occupies a better position than we do ourselves."

"Perhaps so," assented Margaret reluctantly. "All the same, he is not fit to marry a lady like yourself. He has received a totally different education."

"He is a very good, worthy fellow, but—" said Judy, stopping short.

"I understand," said Margaret. "Thank heaven! you do not care for him. If you did, and as he possesses a certain competency, I suppose it would have been my duty not to offer any objections. However, all's well that ends well."

"There can be no question of any affection on my part," said Judy gravely. "I told him so quite plainly. But it was painful, mother, very painful."

"I can well believe that, but I am inexpressibly thankful, that you gave him the answer you did. You are far too young to think of getting married at present. A girl at seventeen or eighteen has had no opportunities of knowing her own mind. If she assumes the responsibilities of marriage at that early age, she resembles a lamb going to the slaughter."

"Mother," said Judy impulsively. "I wish you would tell me something—something that has puzzled me ever since I became old enough to think about our affairs."

"Yes, my dear. What is it?"

"How was it that you ever came to marry father?"

Margaret changed countenance, and sought to avoid her daughter's questioning gaze. The query was unexpected, and therefore it took her completely by surprise. She had to consider a few seconds before replying. Judy already knew so much that any attempt at evasion was impossible. At last, she said:

"I married your father because I was only a foolish, ignorant, romantic child, who did not realize the consequences of her act, and who had not the faintest notion of the obligations imposed by matrimony. I thought it a fine thing to have an admirer and elope as people do in story books. And then, you see, I had no mother, and was very much afraid of my father."

"Poor darling!" exclaimed Judy in accents of commiseration.

The tears rose to Margaret's eyes.

"I do not wish to complain or indulge in self pity," she said. "But since we are on the subject, I warn you most strongly against following my example. If you are foolish enough to do so, you will ruin your life."

"You must have had a miserable time of it,"

said Judy softly. "Anyone can tell that you are a lady born and bred, and father is so unlike you in every way."

"Be advised, child. Never marry in a hurry, or simply because a man flatters your girlish vanity by paying you a few meaningless compliments. Believe me, they count for very little. He will repeat the same sayings to the next woman he meets. In my opinion, it is downright criminal for any English girl to marry before she is two or three and twenty."

"I daresay it is soon enough," acquiesced Judy soberly. But in her own mind, she opined, that a good deal depended upon the wooer. Anybody might be pardoned for losing her heart to a thorough gentleman like the stranger in the pepper and salt coat—a man, so handsome, so courtly, so distinguished! But she did not give utterance to her reflections. Turning to her mother she said:—

"You will not tell father about John Dormer, will you? You know the tenour of his remarks and criticisms. He might hurt Mr. Dormer's feelings, and as we parted quite good friends, and I hope shall remain so, it would be a pity for father to say anything of an awkward nature to him."

"Yes," said Margaret. "I agree with you in thinking it wiser not to mention the matter. In these cases, the less one says, the better very often."

"I suppose you have been very—*very* unhappy ever since you married?" queried Judy, pursuing her own train of thought.

Her mother winced at this direct demand, but answered with a certain quiet dignity, which she assumed on occasions. "You are aware of your father's faults, and it is best for us not to dwell upon them more than we can help. I fervently hope that, individually, you will never allow yourself to be dragged down to a low level, and will always endeavour to rise superior to any debasing influences to which you may, unfortunately, be exposed. Keep your self-respect, and allow no man to rob you of it. That is a woman's best safeguard, and the most reliable."

"It is horrible to feel ashamed of one's own father," said Judy sorrowfully. "And yet, I can't help it sometimes, mother. I hate to see him the worse for liquor and to hear him using disgraceful language. I suppose one ought not to mind, but I can't help doing so. Sometimes, I wish I could sink into the bowels of the earth for very shame, especially when strangers are present. Is it wrong for me to feel like this, I wonder?" And Judy turned a wistful face towards her mother.

Margaret sighed deeply, heavily. So Judy had found him out! It was very sad, very terrible, and yet unavoidable. The girl knew the truth in its entirety.

"We can only trust in God," she said un-

steadily. Dick may have a bad illness or something may happen, which will induce him to reform. We must never give up hope. Your duty and mine is not to censure, but to stick together and act according to the best of our ability. I am awfully sorry for you, my darling Judy. I cannot tell you how inexpessibly grieved I am, that your young life should be blighted by such a shadow, but—”

“Oh! please do not mind about me, mother,” interrupted the girl.

“I must. You are rarely absent from my thoughts. At your age, and with your good looks and accomplishments, you ought to be asked out everywhere in the county and mix with the best society. Instead of which, we live under a kind of cloud, and are treated by all, save a few intimate friends, as mere outsiders not to be admitted within the social pale. It is detestable.”

“Yes,” said Judy meditatively. “Horse-dealing has its disadvantages, I admit.”

“People are apt to behave as if you were an ordinary tradesman, and often show a great want of civility. Even I have experienced that. Most of the men one meets are either impertinently familiar, or else offensively patronizing. Very few regard one as an equal. Now and again, one meets somebody really nice—” and she sighed, “but it is rare.”

“I cannot too strongly impress upon you the necessity of reticence with casual acquaint-

ances in the hunting field," said Margaret. "Fast men are very light in their conversation, and frequently display an unholy delight in shocking young ears. They consider it a joke. But take care never to give them a chance of saying a word against your fair fame. They will be the first to round upon you. And remember this. A girl gets talked about very easily, especially if she happens to be at all nice looking."

"When I go hunting, I don't care in the least for coffee-housing," said Judy in all sincerity. "I infinitely prefer the sport, and consider it a horrid nuisance being button-holed by some old bore, just when your attention is concentrated in an entirely different quarter."

"You seemed to have liked the gentleman who picked you up?" said Margaret, not without curiosity. "You made great friends with him, didn't you?"

"Yes, but he was different," said Judy, shading her face with her hand. "He was not the least like the ordinary run of men. However civil they may pretend to be, they take good care to make me realize that I am only little Judy Garrard, the horse-dealer's daughter. But my unknown treated me like a queen and waited on me hand and foot. I can assure you, mother, it was quite a novel experience, and not an unpleasant one by way of a change."

Again Margaret glanced at her daughter with questioning eyes.

"It is to be hoped you will meet again, since he has made such an impression," she observed playfully.

"He has gone to India and may not return for several years," said Judy.

"Ah! well, perhaps, it is all for the best," sighed Margaret philosophically. "When one does happen to come across a nice man, he is generally too nice for the female peace of mind. That's the worst of it."

"Are you thinking of Sir Reginald," asked Judy innocently.

Margaret coloured faintly, "Sir Reginald has been a good friend to you and me. I wonder what has become of him, by the way? He has not been near us for more than a week, which is quite an unusual occurrence."

"He has had a bad cold and been confined to the house," explained Judy. "I met him yesterday in the Park, whilst I was out walking. He stopped me and asked after you, and said I reminded him of what you were like, when you first married. I do love Sir Reginald, mother. He is such a kind old dear. But he begins to look very shaky. He has aged even since my last holiday."

"Sir Reginald is getting on in years," said Margaret reflectively. "He will be seventy-two years of age next birthday. One has to take that into consideration. I suppose he seems older to you than to me."

"I wish he were my father, or even my

grandfather," exclaimed Judy impulsively. "He is a regular darling, in spite of his age."

Margaret rose from her seat and declared it was time for them to go downstairs. Two days later, Judy returned to Highburgh House for her last term at school. She was quite as happy there as at home, and said goodbye to her parents without any special signs of sorrow. She generally saw her mother once a week, so the parting was not of long duration. The Baronet came to see her off and after she had gone he said to Margaret. "How pretty Judy is growing, and she has such a pleasant, bright manner! It is a great pleasure to me to watch her developing in so promising a fashion. Some of these days, I trust she will repay you, Mrs. Gerrard, for all the care and love you have lavished upon her."

"She does that already," said Margaret, greatly gratified by his praise. "All I pray for is, that at some future period she may fall into the hands of an upright, honourable gentleman, who will be kind and gentle to her."

"Matrimony is indeed a tremendous lottery," he said gravely. "And yet the majority of women turn instinctively towards it."

"Nature is responsible," said Margaret. "We cannot kick against her laws."

"Ahem!" he said, as if struck by a sudden thought. "When the child leaves school, she will want a little pocket money for clothes and so on, won't she?"

"She may *want* it," said Margaret, "but her father is not very generous in such matters. Judy will have to learn to do without a great deal."

"Look here, my dear Mrs. Garrard. You and I have known one another a long time and always been friends. Will you do me a favour?"

"Oh! Sir Reginald. How can I possibly refuse it?"

"All right, then. I want you to let me go on paying that hundred a year into your account. It will help you and Judy along, and make things a bit easier for you than might otherwise be the case. Now, don't refuse, I beseech of you."

"But you have already been so generous! I have accepted too much at your hands. I cannot really agree."

"Nonsense! you must. Don't you see what a pleasure it has been to me to defray the expense of Judy's education and to find her doing credit to us both? If she were my own daughter, I could not take more interest in her. Dear friend, I have not so many pleasures, in spite of my wealth and position. Do not withdraw this one from me. Let me still continue to help you a little."

"If you put it in that way," said Margaret undecidedly.

"I do. There! that is settled. Thank you so much."

Margaret hardly knew what to say. A great drawback to being poor was, that one got into the way of accepting favours. But Sir Reginald's bounty had always been so delicately offered, that it scarcely seemed to place the recipient under an obligation. With the courtesy of a thorough gentleman, he invariably contrived to make it appear that she benefited him, rather than he her. In broken accents, she endeavoured vainly to express her thanks. Judy had hardly been at school a fortnight, when, late one afternoon, a message came from her mother, bidding her return home immediately.

"Your father has had a terrible fall to-day out hunting," wrote Margaret. "He lies in an unconscious state and at present the doctor is unable to say if he will recover. Come at once."

Judy hastily packed a box and drove off in the fly sent to convey her away from Highburgh house. She had not even time to bid its inmates farewell. Arrived at home, her mother met her on the threshold and clasped her in her arms. Margaret looked harassed and worn.

"How is he?" inquired the girl in an awe-struck tone.

"Very bad," came the response. "He lies like a log, breathing heavily, but quite insensible to what is going on around him."

"How did it happen, mother?"

“ It seems he was riding that brute, Joanna, and finding she jumped in a slovenly fashion, determined to give her one of his waking ups. You know what they are, Judy. The mare turned obstinate and refused to make an effort. Finally, she reared over backwards and pitched your father right on to his head. He was picked up in an insensible condition, and brought back in Captain Ricardo’s brougham, which fortunately happened to be near at hand.

“ What a terrible business ! ” exclaimed Judy. “ Joanna is not up to father’s weight, and he ought never to have attempted to hunt her.”

“ I told him so,” said Margaret. “ But he would not take my advice. I fear he is fatally injured.”

CHAPTER XVI

THE BREAD WINNERS

"Is that the Doctor's opinion?" asked Judy in a subdued voice.

"Doctor Brown believes that, in addition to severe concussion of the brain, certain internal injuries exist, but he cannot tell positively until he is able to make a thorough examination," said Margaret in reply. "Meanwhile, his orders are that the patient must be kept extremely quiet and lie in a dark room. I am sorry to have brought you away from school, my dear child, but with your father in this unfortunate condition, I felt I must have some one to help me with the business. I could not manage it and the nursing as well."

"Of course not," acquiesced Judy. "Besides, at such a time as this, my proper place is by your side, mother darling. May I see him, do you think?"

Margaret opened Dick's bedroom door, and hand in hand the two women passed in. Judy

gazed silently at her father. It frightened her to see him lying there on his back, quite motionless and unconscious. Usually, when he swore and used coarse language, it froze the blood in her veins. But now, it would have proved an immense relief to hear him give expression to one of the familiar oaths. His eyes were wide open, the pupils being extended in a fixed, vacant, yet withal distressful stare. His lips were blue, and his florid complexion had assumed a ghastly purple hue. The girl shuddered involuntarily. To see such a big and powerful man—a man always distinguished for his physical strength reduced to a state of absolute feebleness, produced a very painful impression. She touched his hand timidly, but let go of it with an exclamation of alarm. It was icy cold, as if the owner were already dead.

"Oh! mother," she whispered in terrified accents. "Is he going to die?"

"I do not know," came the response, and Margaret struggled hard to retain her composure. "Time alone can tell."

For a whole month, Dick's condition remained most serious. But thanks to his wife's care and nursing, little by little, he began to mend. When the spring came and the sun shone with increasing warmth, he was able to get out in a bath chair. He still complained of a sensation of dizziness in his head, and his sight was greatly affected. Always irritable,

his temper now became almost unbearable. The smallest things put him out, and all irritation retarded his recovery according to Dr. Brown. It was a weary summer both for mother and daughter, but they bore themselves like brave women, sustained by one another's love. They were called upon to exercise infinite patience, infinite tact in their management of the invalid. But Father Time works wonders in the majority of hunting accidents, and when the winter once more came round, its cooler atmosphere exercised a beneficial effect on the sick man, and Dick gradually attempted to go about as usual. He even mounted a horse and declared himself all the better in consequence. He endeavoured to resume his business habits—such as they were—but it soon became evident that his brain had lost much of its former lucidity. His memory was impaired, and he frequently forgot appointments, made only the previous day. Dr. Brown opined, however, that he would slowly improve, and assured Margaret she need no longer feel anxious respecting her husband's condition. Judy was invaluable. She acted as peacemaker in the household, and aided by William took almost entire charge of the business. This division of labour proved of great service to Margaret. She was no longer strong enough to spend hours and hours of every day in the saddle, either exercising horses, or else showing them to customers.

Her equine enthusiasm had waned. Being relieved to a great extent of out-of-door duties, she was able to devote her attention almost exclusively to household ones. The wheels of the establishment ran more smoothly than for many years past. Moreover, Judy proved so successful as a seller, that it soon became evident the family affairs were entrusted to capable hands. Young as she was, she displayed remarkable business abilities. Dick toddled about the yard, smoked his pipe, found fault with and swore freely at his underlings, but Judy was the real mainstay of the stables. She conducted all the correspondence, looked up her father's agents, and secured fresh customers. When the hunting season commenced, people hinted delicately that Dick Garrard had completely lost his nerve since the fall, and no longer rode a yard to hounds.

Before long, the fact became patent to all the world. If Dick perceived a fence ahead, instead of making straight for it as in the olden days, he scuttled off post haste in an opposite direction. His nerve was gone, never to return. He saw double and had to take to glasses. Hitherto, he had worn his years lightly and jauntily, making a gallant fight of it with middle age. Everyone said, that he looked quite fifteen years older since his accident. Meanwhile, he wanted for nothing. His devoted wife and daughter denied themselves, in order to provide him with luxuries, beyond

their means in a usual way. Dick took very kindly to being waited upon hand and foot, and having the best of everything reserved for his special use. If easier to manage in some ways, he became increasingly selfish in others and extorted more servitude from his overworked women-kind. Margaret had always been his abject slave since the first few weeks of their married life. She was allowed no diversions of her own selection. Her pleasures, her tastes, her individuality were merged in his. He tried hard to bring Judy likewise under his yoke, and was partially successful. Had he fully regained his customary strength the girl would not have given in as much as she did. She saw clearly that to do so was bad for his character and served no good purpose. But the doctor's warning to save her father from attacks of irritability carried weight, and she humoured him almost as much as did her mother. So Master Dick led an easy life and was content to let his wife and daughter toil like niggers on his behalf. He superintended, so he told them loftily.

The hunting was now in full swing, and Judy went out about four days a week, generally with a string of horses for the inspection of customers. It was hard work for a young girl, not yet eighteen, but fortunately, she possessed admirable health. Sometimes, her mother accompanied her, and would bring the younger horses home early, leaving Judy to display the

more seasoned animals. Often, as many as five or six mounted men proceeded from the establishment, and Judy spent half her time changing from one hunter to another. Whenever she was seen riding a good one, it was snapped up at once. Naturally, however, they were not all finished performers, and in the exercise of her profession, she took a certain number of falls. Luckily she was light, and seldom hurt herself. Fortune so far smiled upon her.

Sir Reginald frequently met her coming home through his park. All unconsciously, he had got into the way of looking out for the slight girlish figure, and if it failed to appear by a certain hour, he experienced considerable uneasiness. Once or twice, he had even sent round to Fernleigh to inquire if Judy had returned in safety. He admired the courage and steadfastness she displayed in the performance of her arduous duties, even although he deplored the life she was called upon to lead, and deemed it totally unfitted for so young a girl. But although she was often alone, he never heard a whisper against her reputation. On all sides it was admitted, that Judy Garrard conducted herself with perfect modesty and decorum. A great many women might have degenerated, exposed to such constant surroundings of horse and hound, but Sir Reginald was greatly pleased to find his "protegé" remained a perfect little lady both in her manners and conversation. There was

nothing loud or slangy about her. He took a fatherly pride in Judy, which Miss Sylvia thoroughly resented. Nothing would have pleased her better than to hear that Judy had committed some indiscretion.

"My brother is regularly infatuated about those Garrard women," she once said in confidence to her dearest friend, Lady Tellemagain. "Really, if Reginald were twenty or thirty years younger, I should not be a bit surprised if he made a fool of himself with one or other of them."

"Don't distress yourself, my dear," said her ladyship gravely. "He has arrived at a safe age. At seventy-two, the torch of Eros no longer burns as fiercely as in early youth. Depend upon it, Sir Reginald can be trusted."

But Miss Sylvia shook her head in a dissatisfied manner. In her own mind she was not so sure. For a long time past, she had looked upon her brother as a sentimental fool, and she dated his folly ever since the advent of Margaret Garrard upon the scenes. She was by no means easy about him.

It was a bitterly cold day, early in January. The rain descended in pitiless torrents, and a more unpromising hunting morning could not well be imagined. The Garrards were seated at the breakfast table, and conversed with considerable misgivings about the weather. As bad luck would have it, both mother and daughter had appointments to meet customers with horses

in the hunting field. Hunters had had an extra hard season up to Christmas, and the demand for them was extraordinarily brisk. Never had business been in a more flourishing condition. For once Dick was actually out of debt, and had a nice little balance at his bankers—a state of things for which Judy was mainly responsible.

"What a shocking day!" observed the girl, looking out of the window. "It really is not fit for you to think of going, mother dear. You have only just recovered from a bad attack of influenza and ought to stay at home."

Margaret was quite of the same opinion. She felt far from well, and still had a hacking cough, which prevented her from obtaining proper rest at night. She looked questioningly towards her husband, with an air of timid appeal.

"Influenza!" he ejaculated scornfully. "What rubbish! Every foolish woman now-a-days, who happens to have a bit of a cold promptly imagines she is laid up with influenza. As for you, Margaret, it is simply absurd. May I ask if your temperature ever went up to over a hundred, or if you were racked with fever? Those are only two of the usual symptoms, and I am not aware that you suffered from either."

"I felt desperately ill," she meekly murmured.

"Pooh! you are always fancying yourself ill. Some women do."

"Dr. Brown said that I had suppressed influenza, Dick, and declared it was worse than the pronounced kind. He did indeed."

"Doctors can gammon people to any extent. That's their trade. If you believe all the nonsense they cram down your throat, you are a poor, weak, easily-gulled creature, not worth arguing with."

Margaret relapsed into silence. What was the use of talking when the luxury of the most trifling ailment was sternly denied her? She had learnt how to suffer in silence, and to struggle on—ever on, like a patient creature between the shafts, whose burden must be drawn to the end, no matter if it fall by the way. Over her stood a harsh task-master, ever ready to apply the lash or some more exquisite method of torture. She glanced at the weather and sighed resignedly. But Judy took up the cudgels on her behalf.

"It really is not fit for mother to go hunting to-day," she remarked decidedly. "Influenza or no influenza, she is not very strong, and has a nasty cough on her lungs. Her waterproof coat is so old, it lets all the rain through like a sieve. She will get wet to the skin."

"My word!" growled Dick. "You two talk as if you were a couple of fine ladies, who merely went hunting for pleasure. I tell you plainly, that I can't afford to offend my customers for the sake of female whims and fancies."

"They are not whims—" began Judy energetically, but he cut her short.

"Hold your tongue, I say," he cried angrily.

"Don't presume to know better than I. For goodness sake, let us have no more of this infernal rot. If you are both so afraid of a few drops of rain, I had better order a glass case to keep you under at once. I never heard such rubbish."

"Be quiet, Judy dear," interposed Margaret. "Your father is exciting himself and it is bad for him. We had better go and say no more about it. I daresay the weather will clear up after a while."

"Clear up!" grunted Dick, in high dudgeon. "If you have an atom of pluck in your composition, you would not care twopence whether it did or it didn't."

Judy insisted on making her mother wear her own waterproof coat, which was comparatively new. She donned the old one herself, and by-and-by, the two women trotted off together. It was still raining cats and dogs, but Dick saw them depart with equanimity. He sat down in his big leather armchair, smoked one pipe after the other and read the newspaper by the side of the fire. He did not venture out the whole morning. He was inclined to be rheumatic and disliked damp. At one o'clock, the maid servant served him up an excellent mutton chop, followed by a Welsh rabbit, both of which he devoured with extreme relish.

Then he had a glass of port, and three stiff whiskeys and sodas, after which, he smoked more pipes and finally ended by enjoying a

comfortable nap. The day was not so bad, after all! In his opinion, it might have been infinitely worse. About three o'clock Margaret returned, and her better half awoke with a prolonged snore. She was wet to the skin, and her hands and limbs were so benumbed, she had not a particle of feeling left in them.

"Hm!" said Dick sleepily. "How early you have come back."

"We had no sport," she explained, through chattering teeth. "It was simply impossible for the hounds to run a yard, and I do not think I ever felt quite so cold in all my life or so miserable. Judy insisted on my coming home, and promised to follow suit in a quarter of an hour's time. It has never left off raining all day, and the rain actually freezes as it falls."

"Have you sold your horse?" inquired Dick, heedless of his wife's sopping condition. "I hope you have got a good price for him?"

"The gentleman did not turn up at the Meet," said Margaret. "He sent a message to say that the day was so bad, he really could not hunt."

"Confound him!" ejaculated Dick. "I certainly should not have sent so valuable an animal out of my stable in such weather had I not made sure the fellow was man enough to face the elements. Hunting people now-a-days are a chicken-hearted lot." And bending forward, he stirred the fire into a blaze.

Having reported herself, Margaret toiled

wearily upstairs, in order to get rid of her dripping garments. Strange! how her fingers shook. It took her ages to undo the buttons of her—or rather Judy's—coat. Her hands were numb and devoid of all sensation. She rang the bell, and begged the maid to bring her up a large can full of hot water. Nothing would restore her circulation so soon as a warm bath. At least so she imagined.

CHAPTER XVII

MARGARET'S LONG MARTYRDOM COMES TO AN END

THE bath, however, failed in its anticipated effect. When Judy returned she found her mother sitting helplessly in a chair, shivering with cold.

"It was downright brutal making you go hunting on such a day," she observed indignantly. "I felt as if I could have knocked father down this morning, when he insisted on sending you out. It was too bad, mother. He sits in his armchair before the fire and never does a thing, and yet he expects you to toil like a drudge, no matter how ill you may feel."

"He is not well himself, child. We must remember that."

"I can't. I haven't any patience with him, and I don't believe he is nearly as bad as he pretends to be. He likes being waited upon, and ordering us about. It's no use blinking one's eyes at the truth."

Margaret sighed and shook her head, as if too weary to carry on the discussion.

"Do not stand about in your wet clothes," she said. "Go and get yourself changed as quickly as possible."

The girl gladly obeyed this injunction, for she had not a dry stitch on. When she returned to her mother's room, she found her sitting in the same attitude as before. Margaret trembled and coughed by turns. Judy grew alarmed as she listened. The cough was evidently much worse.

"Mother," she cried. "You are ill. I am sure that you are ill."

"Don't say anything to your father," said Margaret in a distressed tone. "He will only be angry and scold. I do not know what is the matter, but I really feel very queer. If it were not for Dick, I should like to go to bed and try and get a little warm. I believe I have taken fresh cold."

"Go to bed at once," said Judy peremptorily. "I'll manage father." So saying she ran down to the kitchen, and in a few minutes brought up a nice, hot water bottle, and never desisted in her efforts until she left her mother comfortably ensconced between the sheets. Then she kissed her affectionately, and said, "Now, I must go and give father his evening meal, otherwise he will begin to fuss and visit his displeasure upon you. Try to sleep, mother dear, and I will bring you something to eat later on."

Dick was extremely scornful when he heard his wife had retired to rest for the remainder of the evening, and accused Judy of aiding and abetting.

"Your mother is really as strong as a horse," he said, making use of his favourite phrase. "But she is curiously nervous and fanciful about herself. If it were not for me, she would always be imagining she was going to die."

"I do not agree with you at all," retorted Judy, provoked to give expression to her sentiments. "Mother has been extremely delicate of late years, only she is so instrumental to your comfort and convenience, that you wilfully close your eyes to the fact, and try to spur her on to fresh effort by ridicule. I tell you plainly it was downright wicked sending her out hunting on such a day as this. The consequences may be fatal."

Dick stared at his daughter in irate amazement. It was not often Judy spoke out so frankly, and he never encouraged her in doing so.

"Come!" he cried angrily. "None of that dammed nonsense. Don't presume to dictate to me. Do you suppose that I do not know your mother's constitution and temperament after living with her all these years?"

Judy managed to restrain her indignation and diverted the conversation into a different channel. He was evidently in a quarrelsome, discontented mood, and the task of keeping him quiet seemed doubly hard in Margaret's absence.

After drinking and smoking so much during the day, and taking no exercise, Dick was as fractious and as unreasonable as a child. He found fault with everything and everybody, and although Judy had contrived to sell a couple of horses, she did not escape his scathing strictures. He missed his wife, although he would not have owned to the fact, and he was out of sorts all round. The girl was thankful when he fell asleep in his armchair, and she escaped from the room. Without losing a moment, she repaired in haste to her mother's apartment. She felt as if she must have some safety valve for her feelings.

"Oh! mother," she exclaimed. "I am so glad to get away. Father was in such a vile temper. I can't think how you have borne with him all these years. If anything were to happen to you, I could not live in this house, I really couldn't." And Judy gave a shudder.

"Poor darling!" murmured Margaret. "I am so sorry for you."

Some unaccustomed note of pain in her mother's voice roused the girl's suspicions. She looked at her sharply. Margaret's usually pale cheeks were flushed with fever. Her breath came in catches. She spoke with difficulty.

"I shall go myself and fetch Dr. Brown to come and see you at once," said Judy, taking a sudden determination. "You are very ill."

"Oh no, please don't. Your father will be furious," gasped Margaret.

"I don't care whether he is or not. He would let you die under his eyes without taking the smallest notice of your condition. He never thinks of anyone but himself." So saying, Judy departed on her errand. To tell the truth, she was seriously alarmed. She did not like her mother's look. Dr. Brown lived close at hand in the village, so it was not a difficult matter to seek his advice. Fortunately, he happened to be at home, and Judy conducted him back in triumph. Directly he saw Margaret and felt her pulse, he pulled a long face. His expression became grave.

"You did quite right to fetch me," he said to Judy. "I sadly fear your mother is in for an attack of pneumonia. She is already in a weakened state from her recent attack of influenza, and it was madness for her to go hunting on such a terribly wet, cold day."

"It was not mother's fault," said Judy, with tears springing to her eyes. "It was entirely my father's. He would not listen to my entreaties, and drove her out against her will and inclination."

"Brute!" muttered Dr. Brown between his clenched teeth. "It is a wonder he has not killed the poor woman long ago. He is selfish to the core."

"Can you sleep in your mother's room to-night, child?" he asked, turning to Judy. "I think she ought to have some one with her. Keep the temperature as even as you can,

and don't let the fire go out. When these attacks of coughing come on, give her a spoonful of the mixture I shall send round. I will look in again the first thing to-morrow morning, and shall hope to hear she has passed a quiet night and feels relieved."

Judy faithfully obeyed his orders. But although she watched with the greatest devotion by Margaret's side, when daylight returned, it was evident no improvement had taken place in the patient's condition. On the contrary, the illness had made rapid progress. When Dr. Brown arrived on the scene, he pronounced both lungs seriously affected, the invalid's temperature was abnormally high, and she suffered severe pain.

"I will send in a trained nurse at once," he said to Judy. "It is too much for you to attend entirely to your mother, and a girl of your age ought not to sit up at night." So saying, he patted Judy kindly on the back.

On leaving the house, he chanced to meet Sir Reginald, and mentioned the grave state in which Mrs. Garrard was lying.

"If she dies, that great brute of a husband of hers will be responsible for his wife's death," he said. "He has no consideration for his women folk, and the way he works that poor creature and the girl is simply monstrous."

Dr. Brown hated Dick as much as he admired and sympathised with the ladies. Sir Reginald received the intelligence with evident

signs of discomposure. Later on in the day, he called in person at Fernleigh and inquired for Judy. The girl happened to be in her mother's room at the time. When Margaret overheard who the visitor was, she expressed a strong desire to speak with her old friend for a few minutes. Judy conveyed this wish to him and he followed her upstairs. Ill as Margaret was by now, she greeted him with a smile, and begged her daughter to leave them together. They were left alone. The Baronet looked round the apartment and noted its evident signs of poverty.

"I hope you will forgive my making this unusual request," she said speaking with effort. "I—I wanted so much to see you. I feel as if I were go—go—ing to die. I don't believe I shall ever get over this attack——"

"For goodness sake, don't talk like that, my dear Mrs. Garrard," he interrupted in alarm. "You are quite a young woman yet and must not give in."

She looked at him with bright, fever-lit eyes.

"If it were not for Judy, and for the thought of leaving that dear child all by herself with her father, I need not tell you how gl—glad I shall be to die. My life has been nothing but a failure and a struggle. One long, long struggle," she repeated, with inexpressible dreariness.

He knew it. A lump rose in his throat as he listened to her words. He realised how ill she was to make such a confession, since, during

all the years of their acquaintance, no similar confidence had ever passed her lips.

"I have sent for you," she resumed tremulously, "because if—if I go soon, I want you to promise me one thing. You have always been a dear, kind friend to me. Will you extend your friendship to my daughter when I am gone?"

He bowed his head in token of assent. He could not trust himself to speak.

"Judy will be so lonely, so forlorn, so forsaken," continued Margaret after a pause. "She will want help and sympathy so badly. Only yesterday, she declared she could not live in this house with her father if anything happened to me. I am distracted when I think of her future."

Sir Reginald took the invalid's hot little hand in his and pressed it.

"On my word of honour as a gentleman," he said solemnly, "I will do all in my power to befriend Judy both for her own sake and for yours. If she seeks a refuge, my home shall be open to her. If she prefers to go out into the world, my purse shall be at her disposal. Friend, dear friend," he concluded, his emotion overpowering all attempts at composure. "If the worst comes to the worst, you may trust me to do my best for your daughter."

"Thank you," she murmured, looking at him with a gaze full of gratitude. She was worn out by the interview, and too weak to say more

Perceiving this, Sir Reginald took one last glance at her and stole softly from the room. He met Judy in the passage, anxiously awaiting him.

"Well, what do you think of mother?" she inquired, hoping to derive some relief to her own fears from his answer.

But he was too honest to raise false hopes.

"I am afraid she is very, very ill," he answered gravely. "God only knows what the issue will be." His voice had lost its firmness of intonation. He experienced great difficulty in maintaining any semblance of composure.

"Oh, Sir Reginald," cried Judy distractedly. "I cannot let her go. I cannot—I cannot, and that is the truth. She is all I have in this world. Life in our house without her would simply spell Purgatory. She is its guardian angel, the one good, pure and refining influence that survives in it. My father—but no, I had better not say anything about him—" And she made a gesture of repulsion more significant than speech. Her listener fully understood.

"We must hope for the best," he said huskily. "And Judy dear," he added, "you must bear up—bear up. It won't do for you to give way."

"I know it won't," said Judy, dashing away a tear with her hand. "But it is such a relief to speak to somebody sympathetic."

Sir Reginald bid the girl good-bye. He was deeply affected. The sight of the sick woman's room, with its shabby furniture, comfortless

appearance and lack of luxuries, and of the small, pitiful, feverish face between the sheets still haunted him. Somehow, he realised as he had never hitherto done, the unhappy attributes of Margaret's married life. She had never known, in spite of her feminine weakness and delicacy, what it was to have a protector in the true sense of the word—a protector in time of trouble, a support on which to lean. It was hard on any woman to have to stand alone—always alone, and maintain an appearance of outward strength. Nature had not formed them to withstand such conditions. Had Margaret Garrard married a kind and affectionate husband, he could picture to himself what a happy, healthy, charming person she would have been. Judy's pretty, tear-stained face, with its clouded eyes, its brave smile and sweet rosebud mouth thrilled him with compassion, and a vague, mysterious feeling yet more potent. But he was far too agitated to analyse its meaning. He attributed the depth of his emotion entirely to the genuine grief occasioned by the illness of the sick woman, who was his friend and neighbour. Curiously enough, he too, thought that Margaret would not recover. Some presentiment warned him that her last hour was rapidly approaching.

The end came with startling suddenness. Only three short days after Dick sent his wife out hunting in the rain, she breathed her last. She had no strength left with which to fight

against the ravages of disease. The lung trouble took fierce hold upon her, and she sank beneath its inroads. At the last, even Judy's heart-broken appeals failed to rouse her from the lethargy into which she had fallen. Unconsciousness supervened, and the suffering spirit passed peacefully away. Margaret Garrard ceased to breathe almost before her husband would admit that she was seriously ill. He accepted her death as a kind of personal insult, and refused to regard it in any other light. What sorrow he experienced was entirely for himself. The beast of burden had fallen between the shafts. It was annoying and inconvenient.

"That extraordinary wife of mine has actually gone and died," he said to an acquaintance, who called to offer his condolences on the sad event. "She was fairly young and always as strong as a horse. Of course, like all women, she fancied she had ailments, but they were purely imaginary. What she has chosen to die of now, Heaven only knows. I believe the doctor calls it pneumonia, and here am I left all alone, with a girl of eighteen on my hands. A nice state of things for a middle-aged man who requires care and attention."

All he thought of was his personal loss. The slave had been so meek, so uncomplaining, so obedient, and above all so useful, that her disappearance from the family circle left a gap not easily to be filled. Dick knew in his own mind

that Margaret would be hard to replace. Judy possessed a higher spirit, and was not so easily coerced. Moreover, she was given to speaking out her mind on occasion in a way he totally disapproved of, but was not wholly able to quell. At such times, she would tell him home truths, which, thick-skinned as he was, sometimes disturbed his equanimity for the moment. Margaret might just as well have lived, instead of upsetting his household in this idiotic fashion. He had a hazy notion that she had died just to spite him. He did not regret his wife much for her own sake, but he regretted her for her utility and the capable manner in which she administered to his various comforts. Dick felt greatly aggrieved by her demise. It was a foolish, inconsiderate, and expensive act.

No doubt, he could soon provide himself with another wife, if he wanted one. There was Miss Bella Cheek, the bright-eyed barmaid at the village pub, where he often dropped in for a glass of cherry brandy. She was a fine young woman with an imposing figure and a ready tongue. But he fancied Bella had a temper, in fact, he was sure of it, and then she was flirtatious, a quality admirable in other men's wives, but not in one's own. On the whole, Dick thought a period of single blessedness had its advantages. He could manage all right until Judy took a husband. If a rich man happened to choose her, then his son-in-law might support him. Egotistical thoughts

of this and a similar nature crowded into Dick's brain as he sat in his customary seat by the fireside, smoking and drinking alternately.

Meanwhile, Judy was utterly prostrated, and since her mother's death seemed to have contracted a peculiar aversion for her father. She looked upon him as the cause of her grief, and could not forgive the callous brutality he displayed in this season of sorrow. And yet her mother had made her promise shortly before her death, that she would look after her father and keep him straight to the best of her—Judy's—ability. It was no light legacy to bequeath to a young girl scarcely eighteen. But, however heavily that promise might weigh upon her, Judy told herself she must not break it.

It was a very sad funeral and a very small one. Sir Reginald attended as a mark of respect, and laid a beautiful wreath upon the grave. When the ceremony was concluded, Dick shuffled off to seek solace from his favourite whiskey bottle. Judy stayed behind, and kneeling down close to the newly-placed sods offered up an earnest prayer. When at length she rose to her feet, she perceived Sir Reginald. He had been standing watching her from a little distance. She felt as if her heart were breaking, and with a quick, impulsive gesture, she turned to him for comfort.

CHAPTER XVIII

SIR REGINALD IS ASTONISHED AT HIMSELF

“My poor little girl,” he said huskily, “my poor, dear little girl! you have indeed a lonely home now, hardly fit for you to dwell in. What are you going to do with yourself, I wonder?”

“I haven’t an idea,” she answered drearily. “I shall have to bear it as best I can. People always *do* have to bear things in this world, it seems to me; so it’s no use indulging in self-pity, besides my mother begged me be—before she died,” the brave voice shook, “to try and keep father straight.”

“The question is, can you?”

“I fear not. Nobody has much influence over him now-a-days. He has been drinking worse than ever since she—she went,” lifting her hand towards the recently-made grave. “He didn’t mind her, and I suppose he won’t mind me.”

“Look here, Judy,” said Sir Reginald. “I

am an old man—old enough to be your grandfather, so you need have no delicacy in appealing to me and letting me help you out of your troubles, whenever they become more than you can bear. Will you promise to look upon me as your friend, my child?"

"You have always been one," she said, raising a pair of wet eyes to his. She looked wonderfully fair, clad in her mourning garments. They seemed to set off the sunny brightness of her hair, the delicate rose tints of her complexion and the richer carmine of her sweet, kissable mouth. Once again, he felt his blood stir mysteriously in response to her youth, her innocence and girlish charm. Oddly enough, the daughter possessed for him, only in a stronger degree, the same inexplicable powers of attraction as her departed mother. From the first moment of their acquaintance, the one had always been fettered by unbreakable ties ; the other stood before him free. But she was a mere child, not eighteen until her next birthday, when by a strange coincidence, he would attain his seventy-third year. A host of curious, dim, unfledged thoughts presented themselves to his mind. Even in their immature state, they startled him to such a degree, that he made a determined effort to thrust them into the background. He was upset and not altogether himself. That was the true solution. He had felt Margaret's death very much indeed, and it reminded him

that his own time was drawing near. He smiled grimly as he recalled how, at forty he used to consider it would be rather pleasant than otherwise to have done with the ills of life on reaching the mature age of sixty or thereabouts. But now that he was really old, he clung even more tenaciously to continued existence than in the days of his prime. His tastes and pleasures had changed so imperceptibly, that he hardly noticed the alteration, and still derived enjoyment from the all-absorbing present. In his vigorous manhood, he liked being constantly in the open air, and took no heed whatever of bad weather. Now he disliked it extremely, and on a wet day ensconced himself comfortably in an armchair before the fire and was content to fall back on the milder diversions of books and newspapers. Neither did he disdain an occasional nap. The provisions of nature are wonderfully wise, and the decay of vitality is so gradually accomplished as to greatly diminish the pain of the process. Nevertheless, Judy Garrard produced quite a curious effect upon Sir Reginald Farndon. She made him feel young again, or, at any rate, comparatively so. Long forgotten sensations, wishes and desires seemed to revive in her presence. He was perfectly willing to befriend the girl for her own sake, but he persuaded himself that in doing so he merely fulfilled the promise given to her dying mother.

Suddenly, it occurred to him, that he had been holding Judy's hand in an absent kind of way for an unconscionably long time. With a rising colour, he gently let it drop, and looked away.

"Poor child," he exclaimed. "You are very brave, and have the advantages of being young and strong into the bargain. All the same, the Almighty has seen fit to place a heavy burden upon your youthful shoulders. Should the time come when you feel you no longer can carry it, then you must allow me to help you to the best of my ability."

"Thank you very much indeed," she said gratefully.

Without fully realising what he meant, she understood that he wanted to be good to her. In her forlorn and sorrow-stricken condition, she was thankful for the smallest sympathy, for from her father she got none and had given up expecting any. If she wept for her dear lost mother in his presence, he pretended to be offended. The least sign of grief on her part was apt to give rise to jealousy on his. If he happened to be near, the relief of crying was denied her. She had to simulate cheerfulness when her heart was well nigh breaking. Regret for the dead was not a sentiment tolerated by Dick. The human machine that failed was no more than the animal one to him. Ten short days after Margaret's funeral, he drove his daughter out into the hunting field

in spite of her bitter remonstrances. He declared that his wife's illness had put him to tremendous expense, and that Judy must contrive to bring more dollars to the family exchequer. She had to go, for alas! the world jogs on just the same like a gigantic grinding stone, crushing into nothingness those who fall beneath its implacable wheel. All too soon, the survivors are forced to resume their customary habits and mode of living. But the grinding stone never stands still or pauses for a moment in its remorseless work. It claims its victims hourly, and those who escape do so with the conviction that their turn will come sooner or later. It is a mere question of time.

Possibly it was well for Judy that so little leisure was granted her in which to review the past. Her loss might have appeared even greater than it did already. She was now obliged to work harder than ever, so hard indeed, that she rarely had a moment to herself. But although outwardly she strove to regain her customary cheerfulness, the image of the fond and patient mother, who had striven so unselfishly to make her childhood happy, lay deeply and tenderly enshrined in her heart. Left alone in the society of her father, Judy realized, as she had never hitherto done, how heavy had been the burden borne by the poor martyr to matrimony during many a long year. As each succeeding day revealed more fully her father's character, it became impossible to wish

the deceased woman back again. Much as a daughter may be made to suffer, her sufferings are infinitesimal when compared with those of a wife. Her slavery is complete. Little by little, Judy consequently became more resigned to her personal loss, deeming it egotistical to grieve. But she did not forget. Her's was a constant and tenacious nature. She came to see, however, that death was infinitely kinder, infinitely more merciful to Dick Garrard's wife than any prolongation of life. The one represented rest ; the other constant struggle and sacrifice.

Often when the girl came home tired physically after a hard day's hunting, she could hardly suppress her disgust at the sight of her father reeling about the room in an intoxicated condition. His language at such seasons was awful and not fit for decent ears. If she tried to escape, he pursued her, and insisted on her keeping him company, saying he had been alone all day and was dull. She had to pacify, soothe and amuse him according to the best of her ability, but the task was no light one. If she succeeded in diverting his attention from the whiskey bottle, she retired to rest comparatively satisfied with her evening's work. But there were times, when her utmost endeavours failed to keep him within bounds. Then, he became so violent that frequently she crept away, fearful lest he should do her any bodily harm. The dread of fire was ever

present and kept her on the alert. He was no longer responsible for his actions, so completely had he yielded to the fatal influences of drink. By degrees the strain told heavily upon her nervous system. She struggled gallantly on until the last day of the hunting season. Spring was far advanced, and for the last fortnight sport had been of the worst description. The chase had ceased to present any attractions, and she returned earlier than usual suffering from a bad headache. To her horror, she found her father in a state of almost total inebriation. When she explained that she had failed to sell an animal he was particularly anxious to get rid off, he used the most terrible language. She turned pale and put her hands to her ears in a vain attempt to shut out the obscene sounds. Unfortunately, the action enraged him beyond measure. So far he had refrained from assaulting his daughter, but to-day he seized both her wrists and gripped them with such force, that she almost fainted with the pain. She was a brave girl, and she looked at him steadily out of scornful eyes. He seemed to feel their unutterable contempt and to resent it. All at once he lifted his great foot and gave her a violent kick, which sent her staggering out of the room. At this indignity, Judy's heart swelled to bursting point. Without waiting to recover her composure, she went straight to Sir Reginald and told him precisely what had happened. He

listened to her narrative with the gravest concern. She was still in her habit, her cheeks flamed and her whole countenance glowed with indignation. She was beside herself with rage, shame and mortification, yet he thought to himself that he had never seen her look so pretty. His pulses stirred responsively.

"I cannot possibly live any more under that man's roof," cried the girl passionately. "I am sure my mother would not wish me to were she alive, for God only knows what I have suffered since her death."

"Poor little dear, poor little dear!" murmured Sir Reginald sympathetically.

"I would rather kill myself than go on living as I am doing," continued Judy excitedly. "Do you think anybody would give me a pound a week as a rough rider? That is about the only thing I am fit for."

On being thus applied to, Sir Reginald became strangely agitated. He merely looked at her by way of answer, and there was a something in his gaze which made her turn her head away and blush. She gathered up her skirt in a hurry and turned to go. She almost wished that she had kept her troubles to herself. Why did he stare at her in that curious, intent manner and what did it mean? Did he consider it impossible for her to gain an honest livelihood, if she forsook her father's roof? Judy felt very much puzzled.

"I—I think I'll go and wander about the

park all night," she said in a faltering tone. "It will be dark and peaceful there. I want to think matters over quietly, and determine what is best to be done. One thing is certain. I can do father's dirty work no longer."

"You never should have been asked to lead such a life," said the Baronet.

"What can an unfortunate woman do?" asked Judy desperately. "Her sex is against her at every turn. Whenever she encounters a man, she has to apologize for it. If I were a man I should emigrate, but no one cares about a useless girl, whose only real accomplishment is riding."

"I don't agree with you there," he rejoined. "As for your spending the night in the Park, wandering about in the dark, you must dismiss that idea."

"What do you advise me to do then?" she inquired.

He considered a moment before replying. However innocent and natural her actions might be in themselves, it was desirable to avoid all scandal. If ill-natured people heard that the girl had spent a night out, they might put an evil construction upon her conduct. There was always some one ready to assail the fair fame of a pretty, young woman. Sir Reginald perceived this clearly enough.

"I am afraid you will not like what I am going to say—," he began.

"I have the greatest faith in your judgment

and experience," she responded. "Do you think I should have come to anybody else in my present trouble?"

He was pleased at this expression of her confidence, and smiled in reply.

"You might, of course sleep the night at my house—" he commenced anew.

"Oh! no," she interrupted hastily. "There is Miss Sylvia. That is quite out of the question."

He winced.

"The house is mine, not my sister's," he replied.

Yes, but Miss Sylvia does just as she likes, and she would be furious were you to bring a little nobody like myself into it."

"We shall see all in good time. The great thing is to avoid any talk until you have settled what you intend doing in the future. Therefore, I recommend your returning to your father's for the present."

"I cannot stay at home for long," objected Judy.

"I do not ask you to. After what has happened, I consider it would be downright wrong for anyone to advise you to remain. Can you trust me, child?"

"I would trust you through thick and thin," she rejoined, much to his satisfaction. "Next to my mother I have always liked and respected you more than anybody in the whole world."

"I am glad of that, Judy. It helps to simplify matters. I think I see my way tolerably

clearly, only I should like a little time for reflection. Will you promise me to go quietly back home now, and to-morrow morning I hope to come and see you and unfold a plan for your consideration, which I trust will ensure your comfort and safety, and remove you once for all from the pernicious influences to which you are now exposed?"

"Oh! thank you so much, Sir Reginald. All I want is to get away and earn my living. I have been so accustomed to an out-of-door life, that I am afraid I should not care to be a governess, even were I clever enough to teach others. Anything to do with horseflesh would suit me capitally."

"In future, I hope you may ride as a lady and not as a professional," he observed gravely. "There are other things in Life as well as hunting."

"Of course I know that. Mother always told me so, but it is very difficult for a young woman to find occupation. As I said before, if I were a man—"

"Don't wish yourself one, Judy. You are infinitely nicer and prettier as you are." And again he looked at her in penetrating fashion.

"Well! if I am to take your advice, I had better slink ignominiously home," she remarked. "I shall creep in at the back door, so that father cannot hear me." And with a bright little nod she tripped off, leaving Sir Reginald standing, watching her departing form.

"I wonder whether she'll agree," he muttered. "A good many girls would, no doubt ; but then she is differently constituted, and does not care a brass farthing for wealth and luxury. Upon my word ! I almost wish she did, and yet I would not have her other than she is—perfectly honest, natural, simple and unaffected. Good night, little Judy, good night." And he wafted her an unseen kiss from the tips of his fingers.

Youth was in her favour, and in spite of her troubles, she slept soundly. At eighteen, they do not weigh heavily.

CHAPTER XIX

A PITILESS LOOKING GLASS

SIR REGINALD, on the other hand, passed an extremely perturbed night. He could not sleep, but tossed about uneasily between the lavender scented sheets. His mind was a veritable battle ground of perplexed and agitating thought. He had comforted Judy by assuring her he was prepared to help her out of the difficulty with her father on the morrow. He also recalled the promise given to Margaret to assist her daughter in case of any serious emergency. That emergency had clearly arisen, and it was manifestly his duty to act up to his word. Dick Garrard had ill-treated and brutally affronted his only child. Evidently, the girl was no longer safe exposed to his tender mercies. Drink had converted him into a perfect fiend, dead to all parental affection. In one of his fits of drunken fury, he might easily do Judy some terrible harm. The mere thought of her being exposed to such danger, awakened

all the chivalry in Sir Reginald's composition. It was by no means the first time he had considered the risk to which she was exposed. Of late, he had pondered frequently over the growing anxieties of the situation, but he only knew of one way calculated to solve the problem. His path literally bristled with obstacles however. What would his sister, Sylvia say? How should he summon up sufficient courage to face her wrath and fierce invective? Then, too, the ridicule of his neighbours and contemporaries was not pleasant to contemplate. He heaved a sigh of despair, and shut his eyes resolutely in a vain effort to woo Sleep. But the portals of the Land of Nod were effectually closed to him on the present occasion. He had heard that to count a hundred was an effective method of obtaining slumber. He started religiously at one, but whenever he got to the numeral, eighteen, he found himself busily subtracting it from seventy-three. What was the correct answer to this puzzling sum? Eighteen from seventy three? Not fifty-five surely! It must be less, and once more he commenced counting. Eighteen from seventy-three. . . . Eighteen from seventy-three! How many did that leave? Alas! the answer was ever the same. He could not alter it one jot.

He rose early, feeling terribly disturbed and unrefreshed. His first act was to consult the looking glass on his dressing table. It stood

before a large bay window, and a strong light poured down upon it. It was a cruel, pitiless, unrelenting glass, which refused to comfort or flatter.

Great Heavens ! how old he looked ! His hair was snow white, myriads of tiny wrinkles crossed and recrossed the toughened epidermis of his countenance. There were gaps among his front teeth, and cleverly constructed plates were responsible for the back ones. His eyebrows were long and shaggy, and when he tried to shave, his hand shook like an aspen leaf. If only he could but have put back the clock ! That thought simply possessed his brain.

Then, he asked himself half indignantly, half wistfully, by what strange irony of Fate this moral revolution should convulse his whole being so late in life ? Why had it not occurred sooner ? Why had it come at all ? These were unanswerable questions. When first the insidious sweetness crept upon him, he resisted it with all his might and main. He was a prey to amazement, incredulity, self-scorn, each in turn. But nothing availed ; neither his wonder, his reluctance, nor his desire to maintain the state of " *statu quo* ." Do what he would, a young girl's face, with its limpid eyes, its rosy mouth and hues of vigorous youth rose Siren-like before his vision. He was powerless to chase them away. They made his blood course with unaccustomed quickness through his withered veins. They caused his heart to beat,

his pulses to throb expectantly at the mere sound of her footfall. The thing was absurd ; so idiotic as to be allied to madness, but in spite of all his convictions, his reasonings and endeavours, there it remained. Above all he dreaded the vicious criticisms of his sister. How unsparing would be her remarks, how unstinted her censure ! It was not easy at his age to face a storm of ridicule and obloquy. Yet, he perceived it looming heavily in the distance. Had he the moral strength to face it ?

Again he cast a despairing glance in the mirror. Alas ! it made no attempt at consolation. It was remorselessly frank. He looked all his age this morning. His cheeks were decidedly less rosy than usual. A liverish, yellowish tint encroached upon their customary apple-like bloom. Sleepless nights did not suit him. They accentuated his wrinkles, and caused the bags under his somewhat sunken eyes to appear looser and flabbier than their wont. In the owner's opinion, they eradicated any lingering traces of juvenility. If the mirror were frank he was equally so and entertained no delusions. He inspected his tongue, and was profoundly dissatisfied with its appearance. He even went the length of taking his temperature and found it slightly above the normal, but this he had quite expected. The poor man sighed a deep and troubled sigh. He was bracing himself to take a tremendous step—a step so portentous, and fraught with so many

consequences agreeable and the reverse, that his whole frame trembled with excitement.

When he descended to the dining room, where Miss Sylvia was already seated at the breakfast table, ensconced behind a magnificent silver urn, he looked haggard and worn, not only in imagination, but in reality. As he entered the apartment, she glanced up at him first casually, then with concern.

"Why, Reginald!" she exclaimed. "What on earth is the matter with you? Are you ill, by any chance?" And she fixed a pair of piercing eyes upon her brother. He turned his head aside with an assumption of carelessness.

"No, I did not sleep very well last night, that is all."

"It is very unusual for you to have a bad night," she responded. "You are such an excellent sleeper, as a rule. Had you any cause for worry?"

"No," he answered mendaciously. "Nothing special. Nobody can escape worry altogether."

"I often think you do too much cutting down those trees. You must remember, Reginald, that you are not as young as you were."

"No," he said, suppressing a sigh. "I suppose not. One cannot possess the gift of eternal youth, no matter how much one may desire it."

After this, they relapsed into silence. In a general way, neither of them felt conversationally

inclined at so early an hour in the morning. They had discussed the day's doings overnight, and little therefore remained to communicate. Sir Reginald read his newspaper attentively. Even when at his best and brightest, he rather dreaded Miss Sylvia's tongue. Encouraged to maintain a discreet silence, she gazed abstractedly out of the window. From where she sat at the table, she commanded an extensive view of the Park. She kept a jealous guard over it, and immediately caused any trespasser to be apprehended. That her brother had given the Garrards permission to enter it when they pleased was an unfailing bone of contention.

"Well! I declare," she suddenly exclaimed. "There is that horsey little girl, battling with an uncommonly restive animal and cutting up all our grass. I wish to goodness she would not bring the brute here. It is quite too bad." The baronet immediately rose to his feet, and walked to a second window, that equally commanded a view of the Park.

"What a terribly hard life that poor child leads!" he said, in accents of pity.

"It's her own choice," rejoined Miss Sylvia sternly. "She ought to have been a nursery governess, or something of that sort."

"She is ever so much too good for such drudgery," he returned indignantly.

"Oh! I don't know. You see, if she had been a lady born and bred, it would have been

different altogether. One would have felt sorry for her then."

"What do you mean?" he asked. And there was a ring of anger in his voice not lost upon his companion.

"A young woman who owns that delightful Dick Garrard for a progenitor can scarcely be considered quite—well! quite a lady."

She delighted in depreciating Judy and never lost an opportunity of so doing. Her brother's partiality first for the mother, and now for the daughter was a source of constant offence to her. She did her best to wean him from it.

"I do not agree with you," he said in accents of cold exasperation. "You have always kept little Judy Garrard at arm's length and never condescended to know her. Therefore, I fail to see how you can adequately judge either her merits or demerits. Oblige me by keeping your opinions to yourself."

As he spoke, his eyes rested lingeringly on the slight girlish figure of the distant horsewoman. There was an expression in them which filled her with sudden alarm. She straightened herself in her chair.

"Reginald," she said, with considerable asperity. "May I inquire if you are going stark, staring mad?" But she received no answer to the query.

He was already out of the room, and a minute later she perceived his tall form wending its way with undignified haste in the direc-

tion of the rider. A frown of deep displeasure settled upon her high and narrow forehead.

"Little Minx!" she muttered. "What brings her here exercising right under our dining room windows at this hour of the day, I should like to know? I call it shameless—positively shameless. Reginald may puff her up as he likes, but to my mind she's nothing more nor less than an artful hussey."

Miss Sylvia would not have been feminine had she not neglected her breakfast and promptly glued her face to the window pane. She kept a strict watch upon Judy and the Baronet. Her curiosity went unrewarded, however, for the girl's horse proved so fractious, that conversation was almost impossible. The brute lashed out in every direction, and Sir Reginald was afraid to approach. After exchanging a few words, he returned to the house and made pretence to finish his cup of tea. Miss Sylvia noticed that when he raised it to his lips, his hand shook. His cheeks were quite red too. The sallow tints had disappeared, giving place to an excited flush. She looked at him with intense disapprobation, and as if aware of her gaze, he took the earliest opportunity of retiring to his study, where she dared not follow him. Nevertheless, she managed to keep an eye upon his movements, and about ten o'clock she saw him leave the house and steal off in the direction of Fernleigh. He had taken the trouble to change his suit, and

wore a flower in his buttonhole. She watched him depart with mixed sensations.

"If he is actually going to make a fool of himself!" she murmured uneasily. Then, she threw her head back with a forced laugh and added.

But no! the thing is impossible—absolutely impossible. I cannot think how such an absurd idea came into my head. After all these years too!"

As for the object of her thoughts, he walked to his destination with a firm step. At last, his mind was thoroughly made up. The sight of Judy battling heroically with the vicious brute on which she was mounted had decided him. The calling she pursued was totally unsuited to her youth, her attainments and good looks. Had she been ill-favoured, it is just possible his opinions might not have proved so strong on certain points. But with Beauty in her favour, he realized the numerous temptations to which she was exposed. If it were in his power to put a stop to them, he would. Arrived at the house, he rang the bell with masculine energy, and was agreeably surprised to find it answered by no less a person than Judy herself. She was still attired in a black Melton riding skirt, a loose covert coat and a sailor hat. This was her favourite costume out of the hunting season. As she could not afford to follow the fashions, she invariably dressed neatly and plainly. But it was all one to Sir Reginald. He had arrived at that infatuated stage when he considered she looked nice in anything. It was a bright, fresh

morning, and the sun shone full on her wavy hair, turning it into gold and showing up the pure tints of her smooth complexion.

"Here I am," he said. "I trust I am punctual to my appointment. Is your father at home, may I ask?"

"Yes," she answered. "But just at present, he is having a look round the yard."

"All the better. I want to have a little private conversation with you, my dear, and it is pleasanter not to be interrupted."

"Will you come in here?" said Judy, showing him into the shabby parlour. He seated himself on an armchair, and she took the one opposite. He seemed to experience some difficulty in beginning, and cleared his throat repeatedly. At last he said, "I asked you yesterday to trust me, Judy. If you remember, I told you I knew of a means to free you from your father's tyranny."

"Yes," she said. "After what has occurred, I feel I can no longer remain in the same house with him. One or other of us must leave. I have had serious thoughts of starting horse-dealing on my own account. I believe I could sell a good few animals. Unfortunately, it wants—capital." And she kicked one little foot moodily against the other.

"You must not dream of doing anything of the kind," he rejoined hurriedly. "It is not a nice life for a young girl, I assure you."

"Perhaps not, but needs must, and beggars can't be choosers, as the saying goes. My choice is limited," she added, her face hardening.

"Oh! Judy, pray do not talk in that strain. I cannot bear to hear you. I have thought the whole situation over most carefully and seriously. Indeed," and his voice faltered with emotion. "I hardly slept a wink last night for pondering over it." He paused for a moment as if gathering courage and then resumed. "The long and short of the whole matter is this: There is a way out of all your difficulties —a safe, respectable, and comfortable way, which will fulfil my promise to your dear mother to protect you from harm. The only question is, will you agree to that way?"

"Naturally," said Judy calmly. "All I want is to get away from here and earn a livelihood in some honest manner. I am not afraid of work. I am accustomed to it. Have you really thought of something that will suit me?"

"I do not want you to work at all, Judy. A pretty young girl of your attractions cannot go out into the world alone without being exposed to many disagreeables. I wish to save you from them."

"But how?" she inquired, feeling puzzled by the mystery with which he enveloped the subject. "I am perfectly willing to be guided by your advice, if you will tell me what it is." So saying, she folded her hands, and awaited

the answer with every outward appearance of composure.

Her total unsuspiciousness rendered it the more difficult for him to explain.

CHAPTER XX

THE HAVEN OF SHELTER FOR GOOD LOOKING YOUNG WOMEN

"I AM afraid you won't approve," he faltered, after a prolonged pause.

"Let me hear first what your plan is," she replied, sensibly enough,

Then, in desperation, he took his courage in his hands and managed to blurt out. "I am quite sure the best thing for you to do is to—marry me."

At first she stared at him in blank astonishment, but after a few seconds, she burst into a fit of hysterical laughter.

"Yes, yes, the best thing for *me*, perhaps, looking entirely from a worldly point of view. But how about *you*? the good kind friend, who has helped my mother along ever since she married? I should be ashamed of myself—positively ashamed of myself, if, for the mere sake of gaining a certain rank and position, I

took advantage of your quixotic kindness and chivalry."

"Judy," he said, in reply to this speech. "You do not understand. You imagine that I should suffer, whereas—"

"Of course you would suffer," she interrupted. "No, no, if that is your celebrated plan, you must think of some other. I could not do you such an injury."

"It wouldn't be one. You don't understand, as I said before. How can I make you? I do not expect a romantic adoration on your side, but I think you care for me in a way. All I ask is that you should give me the right to shield you."

"It is impossible, Sir Reginald. I am awfully fond of you, and have been ever since I can remember. Next to my mother, I like you better than any person in the whole world, but marrying—" And she stopped short.

"I know what you would say," he interposed sadly. "I am too old. You look upon me rather in the light of a grandfather than of a suitor, don't you, Judy? Speak the truth. I know it already."

"Yes," she frankly admitted. "You see you are a lot older even than father."

"Were I to take you to live in my house without giving you my name, ill-natured people would talk," he said gravely.

"But indeed, Sir Reginald, I couldn't live in your house. Don't think me ungrateful, but I really couldn't. It is quite out of the question."

"Why not?" he demanded, somewhat taken aback by the decision of her statement.

"Miss Sylvia would frighten me to death," she murmured.

His countenance cleared. He was afraid of some personal objection.

"I have thought of all that," he said. "My eyes are not blinded to my sister's faults. We should get on much better by ourselves. Sylvia will have to go. She is well off, and can easily find another residence."

"Oh! no," cried Judy. "She must not go on my account. What is this strange idea you have taken into your head? Surely you are not in earnest, Sir Reginald? You are saying this out of pity—pure pity for a motherless girl."

As she finished speaking, she rose from her seat and looked at him with questioning eyes. But he did not flinch, and rising also he placed a kindly hand on either of her shoulders. Somehow, their steady pressure imparted a sense of protection. He was not a lover who came up to her girlish standard of perfection, but he possessed one qualification. He inspired a feeling of absolute trust. He was so old, and so wise, and so good!

"I daresay you will think me an infernal fool, child," he said in an eager voice, "but I swear that I love you very, very dearly. I hardly know when my madness—if it pleases you to call it by that name—stole upon me. Look-

ing back, I believe I have been fond of you for a long time, but since your poor mother's death you have appealed to me more and more strongly. I have admired beyond measure your attempts to keep your father straight. Judy, dear, little Judy, "and his accents rang out clear and true, "believe me, this is no case of pity, but of genuine affection on my part."

The colour mounted in a hot wave to her cheeks.

"You care for me as a daughter," she rejoined.

"No—not as a daughter. Make no mistake about my sentiments. I have seen you grow up from graceful childhood to beautiful womanhood. I have watched you do your duty bravely and nobly. Little by little, an overpowering love has taken possession of me. Child, child, I do not ask for much in return. I am old, and you are young—young and fair. All your life lies before you, whilst most of mine is cast behind. Judy, little Judy," he pleaded, in earnest accents. "I implore you to say yes."

"I can't, Sir Reginald. Indeed I can't," she said, after a while.

"Tell me honestly. Do you care for—any one else?"

It was Judy's turn to flush up now. Instinctively, her thoughts reverted to the wearer of the pepper-and-salt coat. But could she own to an affection for a personage whose

name she did not even know? He had long since disappeared from her horizon. In all the long, long years to come, they might never meet again. And even if they did, it was quite possible he would not know her. Her eyes sought the ground.

"Is there anybody else, Judy?" persisted Sir Reginald.

"No," she faltered. "I have only had one proposal in my life, and that I refused without the slightest hesitation."

He heaved a sigh of profound relief. "In that case, I shall speak to your father," he said in tones of decision.

"I beseech you to do nothing of the kind. I should loath and detest myself were I to take advantage of this strange compassion on your part."

"I have already told you, that compassion is not my motive. Ah! there is Mr. Garrard coming across the yard. I shall go and discuss the matter with him and hear what he has to say on the subject."

"I beg you to keep silent," said Judy thoroughly alarmed. "Remember, you would die of shame, if you were related," blushing deeply and painfully, "to him—you, who are such a great man in the county, and who occupy so fine a position. Pray listen to reason, before going any further."

"Do you suppose that I have not already considered the situation from every point of

view? After what has recently occurred, I take it you have no special wish to meet Mr. Garrard in the future, eh?"

The girl bowed her head silently.

"Very well, then. I propose to make him a fixed yearly allowance, sufficient to keep him in comfort—if not actual luxury. But the conditions are stringent. He must undertake to leave this part of the world and never trouble you more with his presence. If he is the man I take him to be, no insuperable difficulty will prevent my gaining his consent to the arrangement.

Before Judy could offer further remonstrance, he opened the door and passed out. Her reluctance only had the effect of increasing his determination to possess her. He attributed much of her hesitation to delicacy of feeling where he himself was concerned. It endeared her to him all the more. It was not every penniless girl so situated who would have shown such scruples. They did her honour. Had she loved another, he would not have deemed it right to press his claim, but since she was heartwhole, he had sufficient confidence in himself to believe that he could render her happy and comfortable. A few minutes later, Judy perceived him in earnest conversation with her father. She was completely dumbfounded by the unexpected nature of Sir Reginald's project regarding her welfare. The idea of becoming his wife was so totally strange

and unfamiliar, that her brain required time to assimilate it in any degree. Good, kind, dear, old man as he was—the best of friends and most generous of benefactors, she could not bring herself to look upon him in a marital point of view. His hair was white, his face seamed with wrinkles, his shoulders round. He shuffled when he walked and dragged his feet, his hands trembled, his lower jaw dropped after the fashion of old age. When she considered these things, the youth within her rose up in revolt. A gulf separated them. It was not that she did not admire and respect him. She knew him to be a thoroughly good man, and in many respects, she entertained a peculiar reverence for him; but the years stood between them—the long, long years, which—as he truly said—he had already lived, and she looked forward to living. Such a marriage appeared to her unnatural, although she recognized its advantages. It would give her wealth and rank, fine clothes to put on her back, a grand house to live in, and bring freedom from financial care and all the petty worries incidental to poverty. But she did not covet grandeur. She had been plainly reared, and infinitely preferred simple ways. A pretty cottage appealed more to her girlish imagination than a stately mansion. She pictured two young people dwelling in the former, each giving something up for the sake of the other, and happy in a love that soared high above worldly

riches. Young as she was, she had seen through the hollowness and artificiality permeating the so-called "smart set" of the hunting field. The very notion of the neighbours saying she had married Sir Reginald for the sake of his money distressed her beyond measure. People would ridicule him and abuse her behind her back, whilst pretending to be monstrously civil to her face. No, it could not be. She liked him far too well to make so bad a return for his numerous acts of kindness. Besides, the union of eighteen and seventy-three was absurd, quite apart from every other consideration. Such were the girl's reflections. When Dick Garrard heard that Sir Reginald wished to marry his daughter, his first sentiments were full of unmitigated astonishment, not unmixed with incredulity. It did not take him long, however, to perceive the many advantages likely to accrue to himself. As the Baronet gradually unfolded his plans, Dick's eyes glittered with a strange exultation. He was fond of Judy after a fashion, but he was, and always had been—infinitely fonder of number one. Horse dealing was not only an uncertain, but also an eminently unsatisfactory profession. The losses were tremendous, and very few men made it succeed. The most valuable animals had an unfortunate knack of going wrong and developing every ailment under the sun. At best, they were a perilous investment, and the business was hard to work,

when handicapped by insufficient capital. It entailed ceaseless endeavour and personal vigilance. As we know, Dick had long felt unequal to the task of conducting it. Since Margaret's death, Judy had done her utmost, but she was only a girl, and her sex was undeniably against her. For her to make so grand a marriage would be an immense triumph and raise the prestige of the Garrard family in a remarkable degree. He chuckled at the idea of his daughter carrying off so great a "parti." What would all the unmarried spinsters say who had vainly set their caps at Sir Reginald? and how angry their mortified mammas would be! Dick chuckled audibly. True, he demurred somewhat, when Sir Reginald declared^d that the income he proposed settling upon his daughter was entirely dependent upon his withdrawing altogether from the neighbourhood and signing a written guarantee not to molest Judy hereafter. But after a little pressure, he yielded the point, only stipulating in return to be permitted to see his daughter once or twice a year subject to her wishes. This concession Sir Reginald granted, and the matter was amicably arranged between them. Pleased beyond measure at the success of his diplomacy, the Baronet made haste to return to Judy. "It is all right," he announced in a cheerful tone. "Your father has given his consent, and we need not anticipate any trouble from him."

"Given his consent!" echoed Judy scornfully,

"I wonder you went through the farce of asking it. He would not care whether either of us were happy, so long as he benefited himself. He has sold me, I presume?"

She could not help feeling rather bitter. She had toiled hard and faithfully on her father's behalf, and would have done so to the end had he but treated her decently. And now he jumped at the chance of marrying her to an old gentleman, fifty-five years her senior, solely to secure a competence for his declining years. He did not care two straws for the happiness of his only child. That did not enter into his calculations. She set her little white teeth defiantly, and registered an inward vow not to be forced into matrimony against her will. She pictured the scorn and contempt of the stranger with the pepper-and-salt coat. Strange! how he occupied the background of her mind. She found herself perpetually contrasting him with other men of her acquaintance. He alone had made a permanent impression upon her girlish imagination. And yet, they had only met once, and she knew absolutely nothing of him, save that he rode well to hounds, was good to look at, and possessed a curiously thrilling voice. The sound of it still lingered vibrant in the recesses of her memory. She glanced sadly at Sir Reginald. The excitement which he had undergone had brought a flush of crimson to his cheek. With his silvery hair and fresh complexion, he represented a beautiful picture

of kindly, well-to-do, old age. He was a dear, dear, old thing. It rendered her miserable to inflict the smallest pain upon him. But as she reckoned up the fifty-five years that lay blank and interminable between them, involuntarily a shiver ran through her frame. He took her hand in his and pressed it with a lover-like ardour full of pathos.

“What is the matter, my darling child? Are you cold?” he asked tenderly.

She snatched her hand away, and her young bosom rose and fell tumultuously. “No, no, it is not that. But I cannot agree to what you want, Sir Reginald. Oh! how I wish you had not spoken to father in such a hurry. It makes it so much more difficult for me—so much more difficult—” and a sob impeded her utterance. She dreaded the pressure Dick would put upon her.

“Hush! hush! don’t cry. For God’s sake, don’t cry, Judy. I would rather cut my throat than bring tears to those sweet, innocent eyes of yours.”

“You are so—k—kind—so good,” she said brokenly. “I wish I could—m—make you understand. I can’t bear to seem ungrateful, or to hurt your f—feelings in any way and yet—” With a gesture of despair, she turned away.

He coughed gently, but with a certain obstinacy.

“I think it will be best for us not to discuss

the matter any more to-day, dearest child. You are agitated and have been taken by surprise. Think things calmly over, when you are by yourself, and give me an answer later on."

"I am afraid it will be the same, Sir Reginald. It is my fault—my fault altogether. I quite realize that, but I am too young and inexperienced to be a fit wife for you. If I were fifty now, there would not be such a difference in our ages."

"Perhaps not," he agreed soberly. "An unkind fate has decreed that I should not fall in love until very late in life. Nevertheless, there are girls—"

She was quick to read his thought. "Yes, but nobody shall have it in their power to say I married you for your money. That would be unpardonable. Were you more of a stranger, perhaps, I might be tempted to shield myself at your expense, but knowing you as I do, I couldn't be so mean, I couldn't."

"When you talk in that way, Judy, I only love you all the more. What does it matter what the world says, as long as you and I trust one another?"

CHAPTER XXI

YIELDING TO CIRCUMSTANCE

“Does Miss Sylvia know about this?” asked Judy suspiciously.

He coloured. “No, but I have an idea that she smells a rat—to use a vulgar expression. And now, I really must be going. May I come and see you to-morrow?”

“You had better not,” she answered bluntly. “It will do no good.”

“It is hard at my age to have to wait,” he said pathetically. “I think you might let me come, Judy.”

She looked at him with tears springing to her eyes. She was slowly beginning to realize that he cared for her not out of pity, as she had first supposed, but with all the passion his years permitted. This conviction only added to her perplexities. Ought she to subordinate the instincts within her, in order to make some return to so kind a friend?

“If you change your mind—if you can give

me the slightest hope—you will tell me, won't you, my dear?" he said wistfully.

"Yes," she responded, with a struggling smile. "You know I always come to you whenever I am in any trouble, and more is sure to follow."

He could extract no further promise from her, and slowly and reluctantly, he quitted her presence. As he was leaving, he once more encountered Dick, who waited impatiently outside to hear the result of Sir Reginald's interview with his daughter. Our friend Dick was not altogether sure of Judy.

"Well?" he inquired with ill-concealed curiosity.

The Baronet shook his head dejectedly. "She has refused me," he said bluntly.

"Judy has refused you?" echoed Dick wrathfully. "The damned little fool! I'll bring her to her senses in double quick time. You see if I don't."

"Oblige me by using no coercion," rejoined Sir Reginald, his natural dislike of the man momentarily overpowering him. "Your daughter has a perfect right to please herself, and I won't have her bullied. Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear," fumed Dick in reply. "But you little know what an obstinate young devil she is. Please herself indeed! I tell you she is a pauper without a brass farthing to her name. If the girl had an atom of sense she would jump at such a chance, yes, jump at it."

Fortunately for Sir Reginald, he was out of earshot before his future father-in-law had concluded the sentence. Dick's coarse utterances grated painfully upon his susceptibilities at all times, but this morning he found them peculiarly intolerable. Finding his listener had fled, Dick next attacked the unfortunate Judy.

"What's all this confounded rot about your having said 'No' to Sir Reginald?" he shouted out in a loud excited tone.

She eyed him with thinly-veiled contempt, and said coldly. "Our neighbour is suffering from a temporary hallucination, from which he will recover if not encouraged. It is an old man's mania, and a sign of failing powers."

"Failing powers be blowed!" exclaimed Dick angrily. "You should catch him on the hop. You have such an opportunity now, girl, as may never occur again in the whole course of your existence. A title, goodness only knows how many thousands a year, a magnificent place, an adoring old idiot in his dotage at your feet, who cannot possibly live long, and last, but not least—a provision for me—for *me*, all the rest of my days. Are you listening?"

"Yes," she answered wearily. "Judging from the loudness of your voice, I could not well do otherwise."

"And you are goose enough to turn your back on this incredible piece of good fortune?"

"What else can I do, father? I do not love him."

"Fiddledee! For Heaven's sake, don't let any such sentimental rubbish as that stand in your road."

"But I don't call it sentimental rubbish," she rejoined. "I call it doing a man a great and wicked wrong to marry him merely for the sake of his worldly possessions." And she folded her hands with an air of quiet determination.

"Hoity toity! as if thousands of girls don't do so every day. Who are you, pray, to set yourself up on a pedestal? Now just listen to reason. You have it in your power to provide for me and give me a happy and comfortable old age, in return for all the years, when you were young and I had to work to support you. Since my accident out hunting I am no longer the same man I was, and yet you refuse to consider me in the matter, but think only of yourself. It is rank selfishness on your part, Judy, nothing else."

She held her peace. This view of the question had not yet presented itself to her mind, and her father's arguments were extremely disturbing. They contained just sufficient truth to perplex her.

"Not only is your conduct selfish, but criminal," continued Dick, following up the advantage he had gained. "Your poor mother —who did look after me when she was alive, committed me to your care on her death-

bed. With all her faults, poor soul, she would never have treated me like this. There are but you and I left now, Judy, and my health is indifferent, as you know full well. We live a hand-to-mouth life. Supposing you also met with an accident in the hunting field and were disabled like myself? Where should we be then, might I ask? We should starve—simply starve, and all through your obstinacy."

"Oh! Father," the girl exclaimed, with a shudder. "Pray do not talk like that."

"I must, when you behave like a lunatic. Have you sent Sir Reginald to the right about for good and all?"

"He—he said he did not mind waiting," mumbled Judy in confusion.

"Thank God; that he's such a patient old fool," retorted Dick unceremoniously.

Then, drawing close to his daughter, he laid a heavy hand upon her arm and went on, "I give you a fortnight from now in which to come to a decision. That's fair, at any rate; but I warn you, if you don't accept Sir Reginald by the end of that time, I will turn you neck and crop out of doors to rot in the streets. Now, you know exactly what you have to expect."

She could smell his spirit-laden breath, and feel it mingling with her own.

There was a murderous gleam in his eyes, which told that he was bitterly in earnest. Self, Self, ever Self! Her mother had been sacrificed at the shrine of his all-absorbing, all-

encompassing Egotism. Was it also her doom to be swallowed up by the venomous shadow of this overpowering personality? Henceforth, she was aware that she had nothing to expect at his hands. He would be as good as his word, and not hesitate to drive her into a loveless, unsuitable, unnatural marriage, simply to secure an ample provision for himself. He did not give her welfare a thought. She might have been a bale of goods, so easily did he cast her from him. Her heart beat thick and fast. If only her mother had been alive to tender counsel and support in this cruel emergency! It was so hard to stand quite alone—so hard to give pain to the person one liked best in the world; and to defy him who stood nearest, if not dearest. On the personal side of the question, natural instinct rose up in rebellion and scouted the notion of marrying a man old enough to be her grandfather; but on the other, argument after argument seemed hurled against her for the express purpose of overcoming individual inclination. And which was right? That was where the difficulty lay. She felt that between Sir Reginald's desires and her father's, she should end by losing her power of judgment and becoming a mere puppet in their hands. The more she thought over the situation, the more she realised this fact. If only she could hear of some honest occupation. That afternoon, she went round to several farmers of her acquaintance, and enquired if

they could employ her as rough rider for their young horses at a moderate salary. But in every instance, she received the same answer. They did not doubt her ability; in fact, they had had ocular proof of it in the hunting field, but they feared complications with those already in their service. A young and pretty girl was out of place amid bailiffs and labourers. She returned home tired, dispirited and disheartened. On the morrow, she sent an advertisement to the *Morning Post*. She was fond of children, and had received a sufficiently good education to teach young ones. She got but one answer, and on replying, the writer at once took exception to her age. She advertised again, with a like result. She discovered that no matter how willing a young woman may be to work, it is not an easy matter to get a start.

The days passed rapidly, but no suitable employment presented itself for our heroine's acceptance. A profound discouragement gradually took possession of her. Meanwhile, she was aware that her father watched her movements narrowly, although they were hardly on speaking terms, and when they met exchanged but the barest commonplaces. Nevertheless, he gave her distinctly to understand that unless she complied with his wishes, he should not hesitate to put his threat into execution. Poor Judy was at her wit's end. She was cut off from her solitary confidant, and could no longer seek Sir Reginald's advice. She missed him

greatly, and her mental confusion increased hourly. Yet, singularly enough, through all this season of trouble and uncertainty, the image of the stranger in the pepper-and-salt coat stood out clearly. Why did she think so often of him in these days, and why should she keep wondering what he would say to her actions? His opinions were really nothing to her. At last, the fortnight expired.

All day Dick kept his daughter within sight, as if he feared some escapade on her part. When she appeared at her usual place at the supper table, he uttered an involuntary exclamation of relief. The meal over, he said:—

“Well! Judy, your time is up, as far as I am concerned. Let us hope you have come to your senses during the last few days?”

She looked at him mutely and despairingly.

“What! you are as obstinate as ever. I declare you are nothing more nor less than a regular young fiend.” And he ground his teeth savagely.

In truth, he was fiercely angry, for he had quite counted on her submission.

“You know the alternative?” he resumed irritably.

“Yes,” she faltered in reply. “I hoped to have made arrangements enabling me to quit your house ere now. Unfortunately, I did not prove successful in my efforts. Nobody would take me in any capacity.”

“I should think not. Who wants an im-

mature girl of eighteen? She is a drug in the market. Do you intend to accept Sir Reginald or not?"

She trembled and did not answer immediately. Her silence irritated him beyond endurance. To be baulked like this was outrageous.

"By Heaven!" he ejaculated brutally. "Out you go." So saying, he dragged her towards the front door, gave her a violent push and bolted it in her rear. It was a very wet evening. The rain poured down steadily and heavily. The sky overhead was obscured, not a star lit up its sombre surface, and the moon hid her silvery face from vision. The girl was thinly clad in a light blouse, and although the Spring was well advanced, she shivered as the moist drops penetrated the muslin-like material. In a few minutes she was soaked to the skin. Then, sensations of physical discomfort began to assail her with all their compelling and insidious force. In vain she sought to disregard them. Where could she go? What should she do with herself? She had no money—her father had taken good care of that. She had not even a sixpence in her pocket wherewith to beg a night's shelter. All her grand plans of independence and self-support had hopelessly broken down. Lack of means had hindered her at every turn, in conjunction with her youth and inexperience. No one would employ her in any capacity. That was what it came to. Instinctively, she turned

her steps towards Farndon Park, actuated by a faint, unacknowledged hope, that perhaps she might meet Sir Reginald. But the weather was too bad for him to venture out of doors. Wet through and thoroughly miserable, yet still unable to bring herself to take any decided step, she wandered about until past ten o'clock. Then her strength became spent, and she crept inside a wood shed, with the intention of passing the night there. By great good fortune, it happened not to be locked. At least, she was sheltered from the pitiless rain. She collected the wood shavings into a heap, and after a while lay down upon them. They smelt fresh and clean. She was exhausted by mental and physical fatigue. Youth helped her, and she slept soundly, despite the strangeness of her surroundings.

When she awoke the sun was high in the heavens, and to her surprise, Sir Reginald stood before her, his countenance wearing an expression of deepest concern and anxiety. She blushed and rose hastily to her feet.

"My woodman came to me and told me he found you sleeping here," explained the Baronet in accents of distress. "Oh! Judy, how terrible. What has happened?"

"My father turned me out of his house, because I would not marry you," she said.

For sole answer, Sir Reginald opened wide his arms. Somehow or other, she found herself falling into them, much as a child tumbles

into those of its mother after any casual accident. She lay there quite passively, and he smoothed the rebellious locks from her brow and kissed it gently.

"Judy," he whispered. "My darling, little Judy. You do not know the world, or how hard and cruel it is. I will be so good to you, my child. Please God, you shall never have cause for regret. You trust me, don't you?"

She clung to him for he inspired a feeling of absolute security and protection, and she was weary of the strife.

"Yes," she murmured. "I trust you absolutely. I do not love you, Sir Reginald, in the way you wish, but if you are content with liking, great esteem and respect—" breaking off short.

"Could you not call me Reginald," he suggested.

She shook her head.

"I should not dare. It sounds much too familiar."

He half sighed, half smiled. "Cannot you hit on something less formal?"

She considered a moment, then, her countenance brightened.

"If you don't mind, I could call you "Imperator," as I did when I was a child. I always think of you as "Imperator" even now."

"That will do nicely. I remember how you likened me to the Roman emperor."

Once more he kissed her, this time on her sweet, full lips. She shivered a little, and remained passive. Was this how real lovers kissed, she wondered? If only he had not been so old! She had striven to act up to her notions of right, and prayed God to forgive her if she were doing this kind, good, honourable gentleman a harm. Circumstances had proved too strong.

People would all say she married him for his money, but it was not true,—it was not true—it was not true. Her only comfort lay in the fact that Sir Reginald knew her motives were not mercenary. She liked him immensely, but she did not—could not—love him as a lover. Was she to blame for the years that divided her youth from his age?

Thank goodness! the dear old man seemed happy. If he were satisfied and also her father, it did not matter about herself. So she reasoned, as she lay on Sir Reginald's breast, and resolutely closed her eyes to another image that intruded on her vision.

In this way, the engagement of Sir Reginald Farndon to Judy Garrard came about. The world is passing strange.

CHAPTER XXII

THE YOUNG WIFE AND THE OLD HUSBAND

THEY were married so quickly and so quietly that no one had time to talk much beforehand. Prior to the marriage, Sir Reginald went through a terrible scene with his sister. It left a scar which nothing could efface. Miss Sylvia quitted Farndon Hall in high dudgeon, but she had played her cards badly and was forced to go. When it came to the point, she did not like doing so, or vacating the position she had contentedly occupied for so long. But she refused to make the smallest concession, and would not recognise poor little Judy. The result was she incensed her brother to such an extent by her conduct that he was glad to get rid of her, and felt as if he never wished to see her again in the future. The lady therefore departed. Sir Reginald was too old to derive pleasure from a honeymoon in the ordinary acceptation of the word, and as Judy proved perfectly indifferent on the subject,

directly after the ceremony was solemnised, the newly wedded pair took up their quarters in the bridegroom's ancestral home.

To say that the county was taken by surprise, but mildly represented its sentiments. Great was the discussion the event gave rise to, especially amongst mothers of marriageable daughters, who cherished a forlorn hope. They were unanimously of opinion that poor, dear old Sir Reginald had been cruelly taken in by a heartless and designing young person of peculiar talent.

This conviction, however, did not prevent them from calling upon the bride and making her acquaintance. In the majority of instances, they came away agreeably impressed, and reluctantly confessed that nothing could exceed the attention and consideration displayed by the young wife for her elderly husband. They even went so far as to assert that she was quite a lady in manner. Consequently, they resigned themselves to the inevitable, and remarked with a sigh, "Things might have been worse."

Neither Sir Reginald nor Judy took the slightest heed of the tittle tattle to which their marriage gave rise. They knew that a certain amount could not possibly be avoided. They also knew that in course of time people would get tired of discussing their affairs, and demand a more novel subject. But the calls were a different matter altogether. They *had* to be scrupulously returned, unless dire offence were

given. Judy vowed she had not sufficient courage to pay them alone. Sir Reginald sympathized with her timidity, and although Miss Sylvia had very rarely been able to induce him to accompany her on similar expeditions, he consented to escort his youthful bride. So, every afternoon, the big family landau was ordered at three o'clock, and the happy couple set forth in state, intent on the pleasing occupation of dropping pasteboards around. The fates were decidedly against them for, by some odd coincidence, they nearly always found their neighbours at home. Then they had to descend from their coach and pay a formal visit.

To do Sir Reginald justice, he bore the ordeal wonderfully. It was pleasure enough for him to watch his little wife, and to notice what a favourable impression she invariably produced. He never wearied of introducing her into his conversation, and his pride and admiration were positively touching. Aware of this fact, Judy did her best to please, if only on his account. She knew that she was on her probation and hereafter would be classified as a success or a failure. The knowledge stimulated her to exertion. But these ceremonial calls were extremely trying. The summer was unusually hot, nevertheless the Baronet always preferred having the landau closed. He pretended it saved them from being smothered with dust, but in reality, he had a nervous

dread of catching cold, and hated the mere suspicion of a draught. Judy was not long in discovering this fact. Had she protested, he would at once have given orders for the vehicle to be opened, despite his own predilections. She felt in honour bound to hold her peace. For he was kindness itself to her. His solicitude on her behalf was so great that sometimes she felt just a little ashamed at feeling irritated by such needless precautions to ensure her welfare. She really did not want a thick rug tucked about her feet on a broiling hot day, just as if she were an old woman of eighty. Neither did she require a Shetland shawl thrown round her shoulders by a stalwart footman. She was not accustomed to being cared for in this manner, and it bored her terribly. Her husband was welcome to wrap up as he pleased. Perhaps, he was wise to do so, but what applied to him did not exactly apply to herself. Her one endeavour, however, was to prevent Sir Reginald from imagining she suffered from any sensations of "ennui" on these memorable expeditions. And she succeeded admirably. He came to think that she derived as much pleasure and triumph from them as he did himself. He always liked having her by his side, and never seemed happy out of her society. This was at once a compliment and a tie. It often made her realize how completely she had lost her independence. Even if she went for an ordinary

walk, he was in a perfect fidget, and if she rode, he remained in a state of anxiety until her return. What it would be in the hunting season she dreaded to contemplate, for he had promised to let her hunt a couple of days a week and was busily engaged in inspecting horses safe enough and worthy enough to carry his darling. He simply doted upon her, and she made heroic attempts to prove worthy of his affection.

They led a highly regular, methodical life, but its assured ease and comfort proved monotonous to the girl, for she was little more. There was no fun or variety about it. Every morning she got up, knowing that several substantial meals would be provided without any trouble on her part. She did not even descend to the kitchen. The housekeeper treated her as a mere child, and deemed it unnecessary to consult her anent culinary matters. After breakfast she usually adjourned with her husband to his study, wrote a few letters for him and read the newspaper. Then they went for a toddle together round the park and gardens. After that came luncheon, and Sir Reginald generally indulged in a snooze. This was her free time, and she profited by it to run round to the stables or take a little exercise on her own account. But at three o'clock precisely, she was expected to go out with her better half in the carriage. She soon got to detest these dignified, uneventful drives. Towards five

they returned to tea after which the dear old gentleman subsided into his armchair, and remained there until it was time to dress for dinner. If he chanced to wake, he liked to find her in the room. Dinner over they played double dummy bridge, a game that Sir Reginald was peculiarly partial to, and vainly endeavoured to teach his lively inattentive bride. At ten precisely the candles were lit, and they went peacefully off to bed. Such was a specimen of the days. Occasionally they were broken by a dinner party. The Baronet did not care about dining out. He preferred his own fireside.

Judy fully appreciated the advantages of the position bestowed upon her by her husband. She was now a great lady, instead of a little nobody. She was consulted on parochial matters, people were extremely civil to her face, and her patronage was asked for bazaars and every species of charity. She owned a carriage, and she had her horses, her clothes, her pin money, etc. Nevertheless she often hankered after the liberty of her former life. Her present was safe, her future assured. But she was dull—deadly dull. It was impossible to disguise that fact from herself however much she might seek to hide it from her dear 'Imperator.'

They had been married about six months, and were sitting together one dreary November day. Judy had gone hunting in the forenoon,

but returned early in order to be with her old man. She was very good and attentive to him. On the present occasion virtue met with small reward, for he fell asleep. Thinking he was sound off she began moving lightly about the room, her youth rebelling against inaction. She had changed her habit for a silk skirt, and the rustle that it made awoke him.

"How restless you are, my dear!" he exclaimed with just a 'soupçon' of irritation. "That is the only fault I have to find with you. You never can sit still for two minutes at a time. You should guard against perpetual activity." She sank into the armchair by his side and patted him on the hand.

"I am sorry," she said penitently. "I did not mean to wake you."

He smiled affectionately in reply, and after a few minutes dozed off again. But she did not dare stir. She sat there looking at him, and wondering if she were really to blame for her craving for movement, or whether it was merely natural vitality, which rendered it so hard to conform to his love of repose? If he had been young also, would he have wanted to sleep away half his days in a big chair? She questioned it. Fond as she was of him, not a day passed without the gulf between their age making itself apparent. If he seemed to feel it less keenly than she, it was because she endeavoured to mould herself to his habits and customs. Poor dear! how old he looked, with

his head thrown back among the cushions, his mouth open and his kind face furrowed with deep lines. Even since their marriage he had aged. She must make his declining years happy, no matter at what cost to herself. It would never do for him to know that she still thought of the fascinating stranger in the pepper-and-salt coat and wished—What? She hardly knew. Her active brain strayed in a variety of directions, as she sat still as a mouse watching her sleeping husband. Presently a footman softly entered the room bearing a silver salver on which were spread out the afternoon letters. There was one for Judy from a former school friend, and another for Sir Reginald with a thin envelope and a foreign postage stamp.

"You had better put some more coal on the fire," she said to the man. "And be as quiet as you can, so as not to disturb your master."

He obeyed, but just as he was in the act of raising a large lump of coal with the tongs, it slipped and fell with a clatter into the fender.

Sir Reginald stirred uneasily and opened his eyes.

"Eh! what is that?" he inquired drowsily. "Is it tea time?"

"Not yet, Imperator," answered Judy. "James is making up the fire and he has brought you a letter. Do you care to read it now or would you rather wait?" He yawned once or twice and finally sat upright.

“Yes, give it me,” he said.

She rearranged the cushions behind his head whilst the servant stole respectfully from the room. Sir Reginald put on his gold-rimmed spectacles—he had taken to them lately—and pursued the contents of his letter.

“Well!” he exclaimed when he came to the end of it. “That is indeed news!”

“What is?” demanded Judy, her curiosity mildly aroused.

“Why! my nephew writes to say he is coming home from India at once, and will be here almost immediately. In fact he may turn up any day. It seems he has had a bad attack of fever in India, and is being invalided home. As his regiment is due in England next year, I do not suppose he will go out again.”

“I hope the poor fellow is not very ill,” said Judy sympathetically.

“He writes in good spirits at any rate,” said Sir Reginald. “I should very much like you to make his acquaintance. Victor was over here on urgent business last winter, but his stay was all too short. You know that he will be my heir, if—if—” glancing towards his wife, “we do not happen to have any children?”

“Yes,” said Judy reddening, but thinking that event somewhat improbable.

“In the circumstances, my dear wife, I trust you will not object if I ask Victor to make my house his home during his residence in this

country? There are many points connected with the estate which I should like to discuss with him. Of course I vastly prefer having my darling all to myself, but it is one's duty to strive against selfishness."

"I shall be extremely pleased to welcome your nephew," said Judy in all sincerity. "You speak of him as a boy. How old is Captain Farndon?"

"Oh! somewhere about eight-and-twenty. He is the only surviving son of my younger brother, who died many years ago. I am very fond of Victor, although we have not seen much of one another of late."

"Had I not better tell the housemaid to get a room ready, in case he should arrive unexpectedly?" said Judy thoughtfully.

"Yes, put him in the red room with the turret window. That is the one he always likes best when staying here."

"You have never shown me his photograph," said Judy, wondering she had not seen her husband's relative even in that form.

"For the simple reason that I do not possess a single likeness of the boy. He is quite a good-looking chap, I may tell you, little woman."

"I can easily believe that, if he resembles his uncle," she rejoined, with a smile. "I always did admire your splendid Roman features, Imperator."

He patted her on the head. A little flattery from her went a long way.

A week later, as husband and wife were out taking their usual stroll in the Park, they perceived a fly drive up laden with luggage. The occupant immediately jumped out and shook Sir Reginald warmly by the hand.

"Well! uncle, here I am," exclaimed a cheery man's voice.

"Charmed to see you, my dear boy," responded Sir Reginald. "Let me introduce you to my wife, Lady Farndon."

Judy looked up, and there before her stood the hero of her thoughts—the ideal of her girlish imagination. Yes, there he was—the wearer of the pepper-and-salt coat, looking as straight and well-set-up as ever, despite certain traces of recent illness. He gave a start of astonishment.

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated. "You!"

"You," she echoed faintly.

"You don't mean to say that you two have met before?" queried Sir Reginald.

"We met as strangers in the hunting field," she hastened to explain. "But neither knew the other's name. It was purely a chance encounter."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE INEVITABLE SEQUEL

CAPTAIN FARNDON eyed his new aunt-in-law in silence, whilst his face flushed a dull red. He seemed a prey to some intense inward agitation. Judy also was by no means as composed as usual. When she spoke, her voice shook.

"This is indeed a surprise," she said by way of making conversation.

"It is indeed," he answered grimly.

"So you actually knew one another, without being aware of the fact," said Sir Reginald, in jocular tones. "That seems rather odd, does it not?"

"I was out hunting, nearly a year ago," said Judy. I happened to have rather a bad fall, and your nephew was good enough to pick me up, and see me home."

"Of course, I had not the faintest idea he was any relation of yours."

"And I, on my part," said Captain Farndon,

'had no notion when you wrote and informed me of your marriage to a Miss Garrard, that the lady in question was the charming girl whose acquaintance I had made in the hunting field. Allow me to offer my congratulations on the happy event.' But as he spoke the concluding words, his countenance dropped, and he looked the picture of despair. Judy ventured to steal another glance at him.

His fine, soldierly figure remained unaltered, but his face showed signs of illness, not yet overcome. Her heart went out towards him.

"And how is the fever?" inquired Sir Reginald, with solicitude.

"Oh! I am about over that job," answered Captain Farndon. "It leaves one a bit weak, but I shall soon pick up when once I start hunting and get plenty of fresh air and exercise. Anyhow, I've got a year's sick leave, which is something to be thankful for," he added, with an attempt at cheeriness.

"You will of course, make my house your home," said the Baronet.

"Thank you, very much, Uncle Reginald. You are awfully kind." And he looked doubtfully towards Judy.

"Oh! my wife is quite agreeable," said Sir Reginald, interpreting his glance.

"You will be able to take care of her in the hunting field, and relieve my mind of a great anxiety, for to tell the truth, she is such a

precious little person that I could not bear the idea of letting her go unaccompanied."

Judy's pulses were throbbing in an unaccountable manner. Under pretence of giving an order, she hurried from the room, leaving the Baronet alone with his nephew. Directly the door had closed on his wife's retreating form, the elderly lover exclaimed, "You do not know what a brick she is, Victor. I suppose you were awfully surprised, when I wrote and told you of my marriage?"

"I was rather," admitted the younger man. "Although I confess my astonishment ceases when I behold the lady of your choice. She is charming, quite charming," tearing moodily at his moustache.

"I was sure you would think so," said Sir Reginald in high glee.

"The misfortune was, that when you mentioned Miss Garrard's name in your letters, I did not connect her in my mind with—" but Captain Farndon broke off short and did not finish the sentence.

"Well! Victor, my dear boy, all I can say is this: When you marry, I hope you may be as happy as I am. In spite of the difference in years existing between us, we are a most united couple. My wife is a perfect angel. At my age, you will understand what a plunge it was entering into matrimony, but I have never once had cause to regret the experiment. Judy is sweetness itself to me."

"Yes, yes," said Captain Farndon impatiently.

"My little Judy is a veritable treasure," went on good Sir Reginald, warming to his subject. "She has taken the county quite by storm."

"I am not surprised," observed his listener. After his late illness, he appeared to be suffering from depression and debility, and although his host would have enjoyed nothing so much as to stand there, expatiating on the manifold attractions of Lady Farndon, the visitor asked to be shown to his room. Left to his own devices, he sank into an armchair and buried his face in his hands.

"Good God!" he murmured. "What a home-coming! I never dreamt of this, I—who impatiently counted every hour so as to see her again, and discover who she was. Now, my card castle is shattered to the ground past all rebuilding. My uncle's wife forsooth! That girl—that child! And then, to tell me she is happy. I cannot believe it. Such a marriage is against human nature. I wish to Heaven I had never left India." He clenched his teeth, and sat there indulging in sombre thoughts, until it was time to dress for dinner. When he joined his host and hostess, he was several shades paler, but he had regained a semblance of outward composure.

"My wife and I are a very stay at home couple, Victor," said Sir Reginald apologetically. "I hope you will not mind our having nobody

to meet you. Will you take Lady Farndon in, my dear boy? I want you two to become great friends."

The young man advanced to where Judy was seated. She wore a very becoming pale blue tea gown, trimmed with a quantity of soft lace. Her arms shimmered white through the transparent material. A single row of pearls was clasped round her slender throat. Her hair was dressed quite simply in a big loose knot, which rested on the nape of the neck. One or two stray curls hovered lightly over her forehead. She looked wonderfully pretty, wonderfully girlish. As he felt her place her hand upon his arm, a thrill ran through his veins. He strove to utter an ordinary commonplace remark, but he bungled it horribly. She walked by his side as if in a dream, trembling with subdued excitement. Even now, she could hardly realize, that the stranger of her imaginings was her husband's nephew. If only she had known sooner. That was the dim thought which possessed her mind. She was angry with herself for feeling so stupid—so tongue-tied. She knew that her dear old man was particularly anxious she should create a good impression, and here she was, almost unable to utter a word. By a desperate effort, she managed to stammer, "I am so sorry you have been ill."

"It is nothing," he said in return. "I was a fool to leave India. I wish now that I had never done so."

“Why?” she asked innocently. He turned towards her, and for an instant their eyes met. All of a sudden, she blushed to the very roots of her hair—a hot, painful blush, that filled her whole being with a very agony of apprehension. It was a relief when they were seated at table, and her husband sustained the greater portion of the conversation. Sir Reginald was in an uncommonly gay and genial mood. He was delighted at the return of his favourite nephew, and his pleasure was heightened by Victor’s evident admiration for Lady Farndon. It made him feel that, even if he had been an old fool—as some people were good enough to say—Victor condoned his folly on beholding its cause. The Baronet continued to talk and joke, and both his auditors felt infinitely grateful to him. They were relieved from the duty of addressing one another. But what did it avail, when the whole winter was to be spent in each other’s society? They started with the best and most honourable of intentions, but they were only human, and from the first the result was inevitable. They went out hunting together, and returned in like fashion. The seed already sown soon sprouted into life. They struggled loyally against their sensations. They did all in their power not to add complications to the situation, but a time came when they could no longer disguise their feelings. It happened in this wise. Judy’s favourite hunter dropped down dead under her of heart

disease, when only a couple of miles from its stable. The rider was flung heavily to the ground. Captain Farndon took her in his arms and kissed her back to consciousness. On her protesting, he lost all command over himself, and told her how he had loved her madly ever since their first memorable meeting in the hunting field. One confession led to another.

"I have never forgotten that day, Judy," he said. "I fell in love with you at first sight, and my one idea in coming back to England was to seek you out and beg you to become my wife. You can imagine my feelings, when, in my uncle's bride, I recognised you."

"If only I had known, if only I had known," she murmured in reply. "I thought you would never come back, and the sooner I forgot you the better."

"You did care for me then, Judy?"

"Hush, hush! please don't ask. You know —you must know," she added, with a sudden burst of passion. "Don't try to make me say it in words."

"It seems to me we have been cheated out of our happiness," he said bitterly.

"No, no. I only am to blame. You see I could not judge you by myself, and I made certain we should never meet again. When my father turned me out of his house, I was lonely, miserable, desperate. I told Sir Reginald I did not love him, but he said he did not care. He took me as I was. He gave me his name

and position, and ever since has continued to shower benefits upon me. We may suffer, you and I, but he must never do so. There is but one course open to us, Victor."

"What is that?" her companion demanded sadly.

"We must part. I cannot deceive my dear, kind, old husband, or go on living a double life any longer. It will kill me, for already a load of guilt lies heavy on my conscience."

"I suppose I had better volunteer to go to South Africa," he said.

She shuddered, then straightened herself.

"Yes, I think you had better leave England. It will be easier for both of us."

"You are right. I will leave Farndon Hall to-morrow morning early. My uncle is the best old chap in the world, bar none, and I feel as if I could cut my throat over this miserable business. If we had not met previously, Judy, it would have seemed inexcusable, but as it is—" And he came to an abrupt pause.

"As it is, we must wish one another good-bye," she said gently but firmly. "Everything comes too late in this world. One's whole history is made up of 'might-have-beens.' Is it not unutterably sad?"

"Can you go on living your present existence, Judy?"

"Yes, I must. I will. He is so kind, so trustful and generous. I would not abuse his confidence for all I am worth."

"You are right as usual," said Captain Farndon. "We must make up our minds to be unhappy, rather than sacrifice the good, old man, whose only fault consists in having married you, worse luck!"

"Do not blame Sir Reginald in any particular. I am infinitely grateful to him for having saved me from starvation—if not worse. And, remember, you were not there," she added shyly.

"I wish to God I had been. Shall you tell my uncle of this affair?"

"Most decidedly. It is my duty to have no secrets from him. I could not rest were it otherwise. He is so simple, so honest, and unsuspecting. And he will give me good advice, no matter how his personal feelings are wounded. He is extraordinarily just and open minded.

The following morning, Captain Farndon took his departure at an early hour. Sir Reginald was both surprised at, and distressed by, his nephew's action.

"What can be the matter with Victor?" he kept on saying to his wife. "He vows he is going to enlist for South Africa, yet only the other day he declared he had not the smallest desire to go there, and said how lucky he was to be able to hunt at home."

"I think he has some good reason," said Judy enigmatically.

"As you and he seemed such excellent friends, I was on the point of proposing to him

to leave the army altogether, and settle down here," continued Sir Reginald plaintively. "I thought it would be a good thing for him to become acquainted with all the people on the estate, and make friends."

"Imperator," cried Judy, her face aflame. "Do not say another word, I implore you. There is something I must tell you at once—something that won't keep."

"Very well, my dear," he rejoined, smiling pleasantly. "Let us go into my study, where we shall be undisturbed. After all, it is nice to be alone with you again. A third person robs me a little of your society." So saying, he sat down in his favourite armchair by the fireside. It was a cold, foggy, frosty morning. A thick grey mist hung over the park. Everything was sodden, grey and gloomy out of doors. Judy shivered and drew down the blind.

"What are you doing that for?" asked her husband. "Surely there is little enough light as it is, without wishing to blot it out."

She drew a footstool close to his feet, and leaning her head on his knee, grasped him tight by the right hand.

"Don't look at me," she began. "If you are too angry for words, I shall know; but if you feel ever so little sorry, keep tight hold of my hand. It will give me courage."

"Judy," he said, beginning to feel thoroughly alarmed. "What is wrong with you?"

She steadied her voice to the best of her ability.

"Imperator, dear Imperator," she commenced. "I have a terrible confession to make, I don't know if you will ev—ever forgive me. Do let the room be dark."

"But what is it, dearest child? There! there! don't cry."

"I—I can't help it. You know when you wanted to marry me, you asked me if if—there was any one else for whom I cared?"

"Yes. You answered in the negative."

"I thought at the time I spoke the truth. I did not realise my own feelings, and I only met Victor once out hunting—"

"Victor!" he ejaculated hoarsely. "Victor, my God!"

"I did not even know his name," she resumed, making a desperate effort not to break down completely. "I only saw him once, but somehow, I thought a great deal of him after that meeting. I was ashamed and never told a soul. How could I? Imperator," she added despairingly. "Can't you understand?"

"I am afraid I understand only too well," he said slowly and weightily. But he did not relax his hold of the little hot hand he held in his own. Thus encouraged she proceeded.

"Victor knew nothing about me either, but it appears he returned to England with the intention of proposing to me. I suppose it was a case of love at first sight on both sides.

When he discovered that I was your wife, he made a vow never to let me become aware of his feelings, but somehow, Imperator—somehow—" And the small nervous fingers closed round his.

"Yes, Judy, go on. It will relieve you to make a clean breast of it all."

"That's what I want to do. I would rather cut my throat than behave badly or dishonourably to you, so although I knew I should give you pain, I determined to conceal nothing, no matter how much you blamed me. For I really am awfully fond of you, Imperator. I really am—I really am, if only you can make allowance."

CHAPTER XXIV

A PILLAR OF STRENGTH

"I will try to do so, my dear," he said in a low voice.

"I told Victor he must leave at once," she went on. "There was nothing else to be done. We could not help loving one another, but we could help doing wilful wrong. Now, Imperator," drawing a long breath. "You know the whole story. Can you—can you forgive me?" As she finished speaking, her voice became strangled by a sob. Her courage had not proved equal to the occasion. It was weak—cowardly to break down like this, so she told herself.

There was a long silence, so long that the beatings of her heart sounded like a sledge hammer in her ears. She began to feel dismayed, only the steady pressure of his hand exercised a reassuring effect. At last he spoke.

"Forgive you!" he cried in a clear voice. "I am proud of you, my darling—proud of the

trust and confidence you have seen fit to repose in me. Don't be afraid of my abusing it. Poor child!" and he stroked her hair tenderly. "You make me realise the gap between us. Had I but known you and Victor cared for one another before our marriage, nothing would have induced me to urge you to become my wife. I acted selfishly. I see that clearly now. I persuaded you to give your consent, because I wanted you badly, and took advantage of your father's cruel conduct to make you mine. That is the truth, and I blame myself severely for my share in the proceedings. Don't reproach yourself, my dear. You and Victor can no more help the young blood that runs in your veins, than can Winter hinder the Spring sap from bursting forth and turning the earth into a Paradise of green. Nature will have her course. There is no going against her laws. I recognise the fact too late. Don't cry, my darling. It is I—I only who am to blame."

She flung her arms round his neck in a passion of admiring gratitude.

"Oh! Imperator, how good you are. I wish I were worthy of your love, but I will try to be, I will indeed."

He kissed her tear-stained face, and knowing him to be a good man and a just, she clung to him as to a pillar of strength. In seeking to lighten his wife's grief, he bravely hid his own. Presently, she said miserably,

"I hope you do not think me horribly

ungrateful, Imperator. I owe everything to you, and I am fully alive to that fact."

"You were perfectly honest," he said in reply. "You told me distinctly before you accepted me, that you did not really love me. I hoped that in time you might get to care more, and was willing to take the chance. But of course when your affections where already engaged, it was a different matter altogether."

"You don't think I wilfully deceived you?" she queried tremulously.

"No, my dear, certainly not. I believe you and Victor implicitly, and sympathise with both of you. Unfortunately, short of putting myself out of the way, I am powerless to remedy the evil." He paused for a moment, then added. "You will have to wait until my—death for release."

"Oh! Imperator, for Heaven's sake don't talk like that. You make me feel such a wretch." And a tear stole down Judy's cheek.

"In the natural course of events you are bound to outlive me," he said quietly. "My chief desire now is to make reparation, and when I am gone, I want you to remember this, Judy. Nothing would please me more, than for you and Victor to become man and wife."

Once again she clung to him in a spasmodic embrace, and kissed him repeatedly.

He smiled tenderly, but wearily. His illusions had vanished.

"You have made me very happy, my darling,"

he said huskily. "I have much—very much for which to thank you. And now, dearest child, I think I should like to be left alone for a little while, in order to think this matter over. Go out for a walk, and try and keep up your spirits."

When she had left the room, he sighed heavily. All the sunshine seemed suddenly to have been withdrawn from his life. He felt at least ten years older. True, he had known all along that his wife did not love him with the passionate love a younger man might have inspired, but hitherto he was content with the affection she showed towards him, believing that none other occupied a place in her heart. Now, this belief was cruelly shattered, and his awakening proved rude. For months past he had lived in a fool's paradise, persuading himself that Judy was thoroughly happy in his society. He realized the unwelcome fact that youth rebels and cannot be wedded to age with impunity. The weight of his years oppressed him.

Well! well! there was nothing for it but to hold their tongues, keep up appearances and jog along together as amicably as they could, until the end of the chapter. But the poetry, the romance, the sentiment of his love match were gone, never to return. Henceforth, he could not even think of his nephew without a train of painful thoughts invading his brain.

The day was so depressing out of doors that

he had a good excuse for not leaving the house. Therefore, the customary drive was dispensed with, and he spent the greater part of the afternoon in solitude, as Judy had an appointment which she was forced to keep. On her return he greeted her apparently with his customary cheerfulness, and conversed on ordinary topics. She was infinitely grateful to him.

As the winter wore slowly to an end, she redoubled her attentions, in a pathetic endeavour on her side to atone for the pain she knew she had inflicted upon him. Her affection was perfectly genuine. It was that of a child for a beloved parent, calm and enduring, undisturbed by any fiery element. To all outward semblance, Sir Reginald and Lady Farndon were a most devoted couple. People wondered not a little at her ladyship being so demure and well-behaved. At the time of her marriage they predicted she would indulge in flirtation, but to the general surprise she seemed far too much taken up with her old man to care for anybody else. She was quoted in the county as a model wife. But in spite of all her tender solicitude, it was a matter of universal comment how much Sir Reginald had aged. He seemed to be rapidly breaking up.

Early in spring, the Baronet suffered from a severe attack of influenza, which left him in a most prostrate condition. The doctor advised a visit to the sea side, but his patient was reluctant to leave home.

Sir Reginald rarely went out now, but sat nearly all day crouched over the fire. Judy became seriously alarmed about her husband's state of health. Meanwhile, they heard nothing from Captain Farndon, but they learned from the newspapers that he had been badly wounded in an engagement with the Boers, and since then was reported missing. In addition to her other anxieties, Judy was harassed by a firm conviction that he had succumbed to the hardships of War. For surely, if he still survived, he would have written a line to his uncle. Every day when the letters came her heart beat with a great thump, and every day a sickening sense of disappointment succeeded the momentary hope and expectation.

At length the summer came round, and from being very cold, the weather turned stiflingly hot. It seemed to suit Sir Reginald, and he revived somewhat. He even began to stroll about the gardens and park again, much to his wife's delight. She thought he would soon be himself having taken a turn. His spirits improved, and they both congratulated themselves on the worst being over. But one close morning early in August, as they were dressing he called to her from his room. She ran to him immediately. He was in the act of putting on his coat. He smiled at her and extended his hand.

"Don't be afraid, my darling," he said. "I do not feel very well, and I think I will lie down on the bed for a few minutes."

She looked at him and did not like the colour of his face.

"Let me send for the doctor," she said in tones of alarm.

"No, no, it's nothing—only a passing attack," he faltered in return.

All of a sudden he tottered, and would have fallen, had she not supported him to an arm-chair close by. He did not speak, but breathed heavily, and in a manner not calculated to assuage his wife's fears. She promptly rang the bell and ordered Sir Reginald's valet to go at once for the doctor. Then she returned to her husband. He was very still now, and she thought he was sleeping peacefully. So she knelt by his side and laid her cheek against his hand. Neither of them moved. She heard the big clock on the staircase chime nine and a minute or two later the gong sounded for breakfast. But she dared not disturb the invalid, who was resting so quietly and calmly. After a considerable interval, she shivered a little—she hardly knew why. Gradually, it struck her that the hand touching her cheek was growing cold. She rose to her feet and gazed anxiously at her husband's features. They were reassuringly placid. A smile played round his lips. His eyes were closed. The whole expression of his countenance was touchingly tranquil. Once more she seated herself at his feet and waited patiently for the doctor to

arrive. On his entrance she started up in order to greet him, and said,

“I am so glad you have come at last. Sir Reginald did not feel well this morning, but he is sleeping off his indisposition. Please do not disturb him unnecessarily.”

The doctor advanced and eyed the patient with a professional eye. Then he stooped and felt his pulse. A change came over his face. He drew Judy gently towards the window, and glanced at her with compassion.

“My dear Lady Farndon,” he commenced. “Prepare yourself for a shock. I sadly fear your good, kind husband is beyond my aid.”

“Beyond your aid?” she echoed in bewilderment. “What do you mean?”

“Sir Reginald has passed away owing to sudden failure of the heart’s action, such as frequently occurs after a severe attack of influenza.”

She was completely stunned by the suddenness of the event. Not until several hours later did her grief find vent in words.

“Imperator,” she then exclaimed. “My dear, kind Imperator. I have no one in the whole world but you. Do speak to me. Oh! please do.”

But alas! her appeal remained unanswered. By degrees she realised the fact of his death. The family solicitor helped her in making arrangements for the funeral. Otherwise, she was quite alone in her hour of trouble, Miss

Sylvia still refused to make friends, and Sir Reginald had no near relatives. The one who might have helped her was in a far distant land. For all she knew, perhaps, he too had vanished into the valley of shadows.

She felt unutterably lonely. The very grandeur and luxury of her surroundings depressed her. Sir Reginald left his widow a large fortune, but the estate went to Captain Farndon, and failing him to the next of kin. When the will was read, it transpired that a codicil had recently been added, expressing a strong desire the testator's wife should marry his nephew on his decease. A lump rose to Judy's throat, on again hearing this pathetic request. How good he was, even in death!

Ultimately, she would have to leave Farndon Hall and reside in the dower house, but six months were granted her before making any change. Oddly enough, however, now she was her own mistress, she did not experience the smallest desire to avail herself of her liberty. The uncertainty about Victor haunted her day and night. Was he alive or dead? If the former, sooner or later he would return to claim his heritage.

Again people wondered at the young widow's devotion, and were puzzled by her attitude. Every day she visited her husband's grave, and laid an offering of flowers upon it. How thankful she was—now that her dear old man no longer existed—to think that she had never

wronged him. Thank Heaven! Remorse was not added to her sorrow. Her conscience was free.

The world went on as usual, but Judy could not attune herself to its merry side. Time only could help her to recover, for although, outwardly, she mourned but a single dear one, inwardly, she grieved for the loss of two. So the autumn months passed drearily away. One event only broke the monotony. Her father called to see her. But the sight of him failed utterly to bring any comfort. It was evident both from his appearance and conversation that he had sunk lower and lower. She shrank with horror from his parental embrace, and was infinitely relieved when he took his departure. Her loneliness increased, for she had but few real friends. The people who made a fuss with her during her husband's lifetime, no longer cultivated her acquaintance. Those she had known formerly, jumped at the conclusion that she had become too grand. She fell between two stools—as it were. As for the men—they would have fluttered round her in great numbers had she permitted their attentions. A young widow, pretty, rich and independent was not likely to lack admirers, eager to share her fortune. But Judy wanted none of them. She showed the cold shoulder to all aspiring suitors, and kept them at a distance. Her heart ached. Where was Victor? Ah! where was Victor?

CHAPTER XXV

CONCLUSION

IT was in November, and the hunting season had commenced. Of course, she could not think of following hounds so soon after her bereavement, and her days passed monotonously. In the morning, she visited the conservatories and robbed them of their choicest flowers; in the afternoon, she went to the churchyard and laid them on Sir Reginald's grave. She had caused a fine marble cross to be erected at the head, but at the foot was a simple bench on which she was wont to sit and meditate on the good qualities of the departed man. On such occasions, it would be idle to pretend that her thoughts did not frequently stray in a totally different direction. She could not tear herself away from the spot, because some inward conviction seemed to warn her, that if Captain Farndon were still in the land of the living, he would infallibly visit the place, where his uncle was buried. On the particular

day in question, a sharp frost had prevailed over night, bringing down the leaves in every direction. It was a fine but cold afternoon. The little village churchyard was situated in a most secluded and picturesque position, and save on the Sabbath—was rarely visited save by Lady Farndon. She could usually sit there without any fear of interruption. She laid the flowers reverently on the grave and sinking down upon the bench before long sank into a reverie. It was very quiet and very peaceful there. Not a sound broke the stillness, save the occasional rustle of a falling leaf. It was here that she dreamed her dreams, and hoped and prayed. Already, in her young life she had known much grief and suffering. She had lost both her mother and her husband, and she was not yet twenty.

Of what use to a woman were wealth, position, material ease and comfort, when she was unutterably lonely? Judy hungered for companionship—for the congenial interchange of spirit, which alone renders life supportable. The outlook was very drear and dark. Her dear old husband was gone, on whom she had been accustomed to lean, and whose wise counsel she had, perhaps, insufficiently appreciated during his lifetime. And the man she loved—the man who had fastened with such peculiar force upon her girlish imagination from the first moment of meeting was—where? Alas! she did not know. Only, if he were not

dead and buried, surely he would have given some sign ere now. The tears gathered in her eyes, and dropped upon the little ungloved hands lying listlessly clasped upon her lap.

"Judy," said a voice from behind.

In her surprise and overpowering joy, she uttered a cry and started to her feet. A mist obscured her vision. Her throat grew tight, her heart stopped beating. She staggered into Victor Farndon's outstretched arms. He rained kisses upon her sweet, wet face.

"Judy," he said. "*My Judy . . .*"

"Where have you been? Why did you not come before? Couldn't you write or telegraph?" she asked incoherently. Then, with a happy sob, she added. "I—I—thought you—you—were dead . . ."

"When wounded, I was far away up country," he explained. "The Boers carried me off, mistaking me for a personage of importance, whom I was supposed to resemble. They kept me prisoner until the Proclamation of Peace. I heard nothing; knew nothing. I was invalided home and set sail for England. Only on the eve of embarkation did I learn the sad news of my Uncle's death. . . ."

"You might have telegraphed then," she interrupted.

"Perhaps; I was a big fool, but I did not like to. We have not met for many months, and I—I thought you might have changed in

your sentiments towards me." She merely glanced reproachfully at him by way of reply.

Upon this, they behaved very foolishly, but after the fashion of lovers, and they were happy as only youth can be. But to their credit, they did not forget the dead, who rested in the cold ground at their feet. Hand in hand, they vowed to fulfil his last request, and in becoming man and wife ever to strive to act up to the noble, honourable and unselfish example he had set them.

These two young people had bowed their heads submissively to the cross, and not attempted to defy the laws of Honour and Convention imposed by their country. Even now, when they met with reward, they accepted it humbly and gratefully as a good gift of God, and thanked Him for having kept their actions unsullied, their consciences clean.

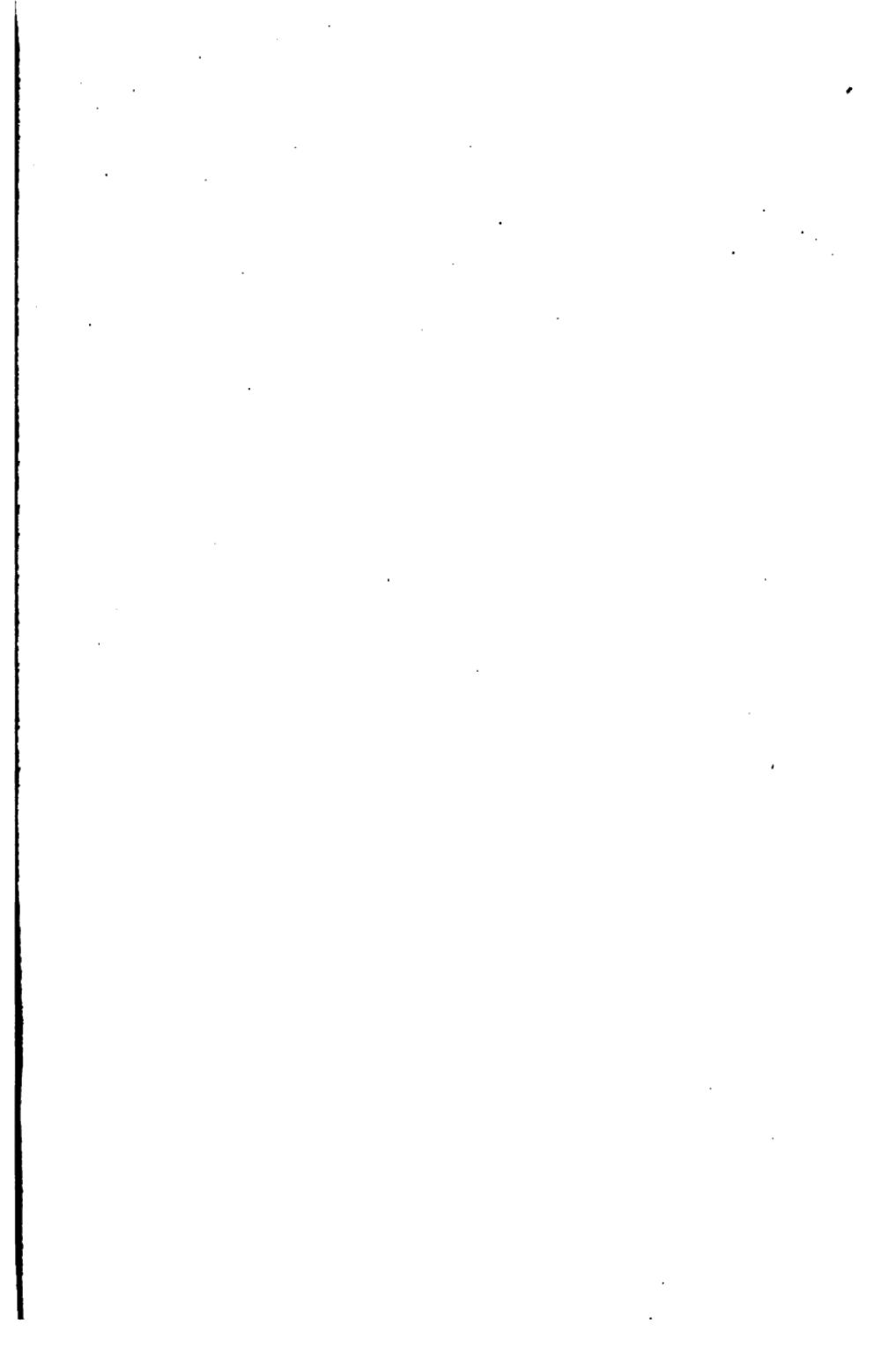
"I am so glad we suffered and parted, rather than do anything wicked," whispered Judy in her lover's ear. "We should not be half so happy now if we had anything real to reproach ourselves with."

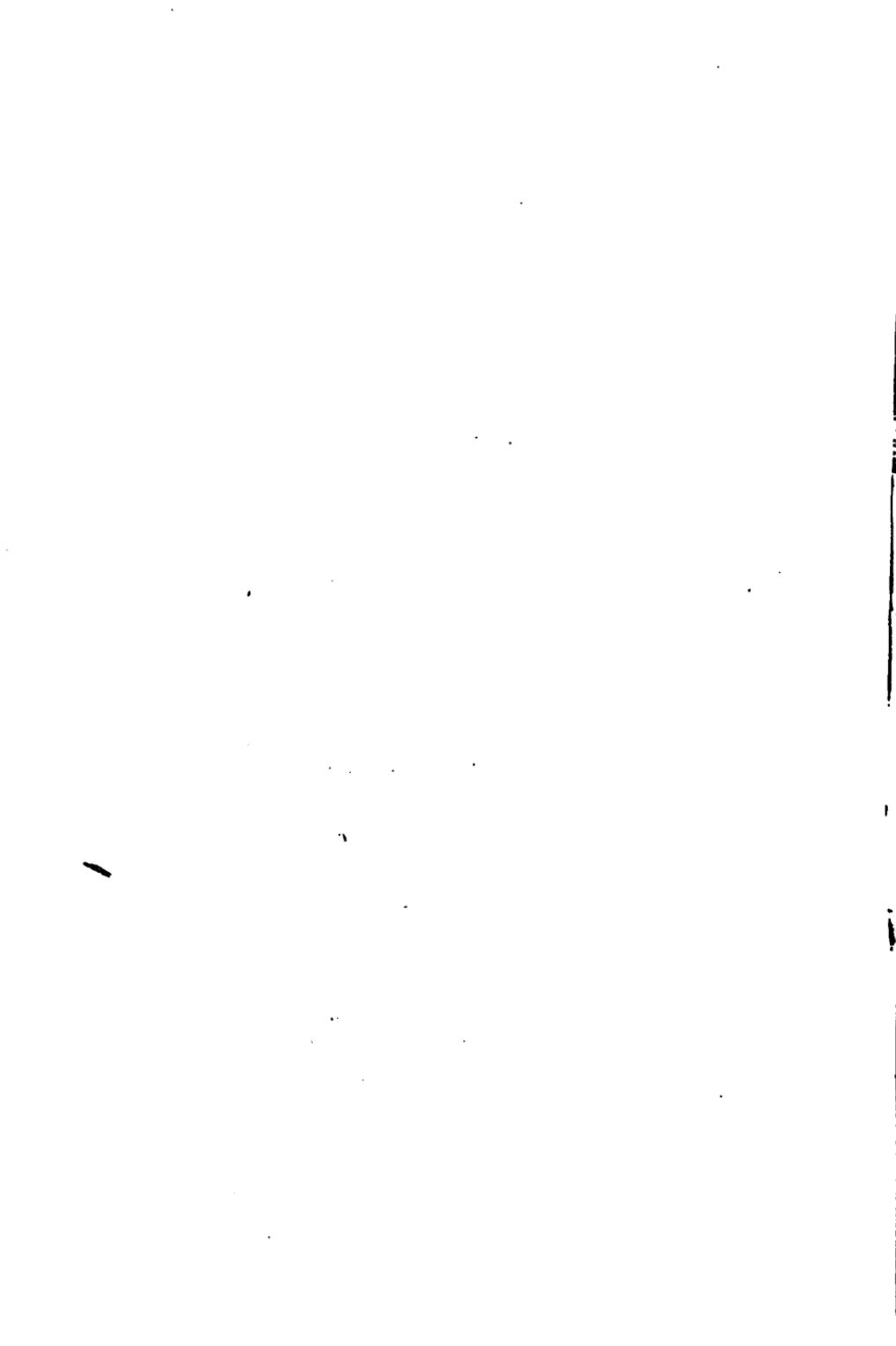
For sole answer, he clasped her tight to his heart.

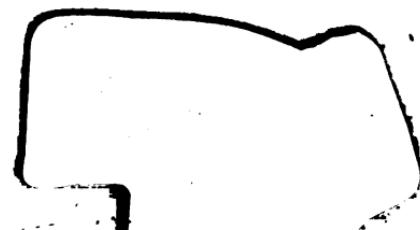
Whether bitter or sweet, Victor and Judy Farndon may be left to tread the path of life to its end. They belong to those, who prefer Right to Wrong, Duty to personal Pleasure. It may be taken for granted, that whatever the

Future contains of good or of evil, they will walk straightly and courageously to the final goal.

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